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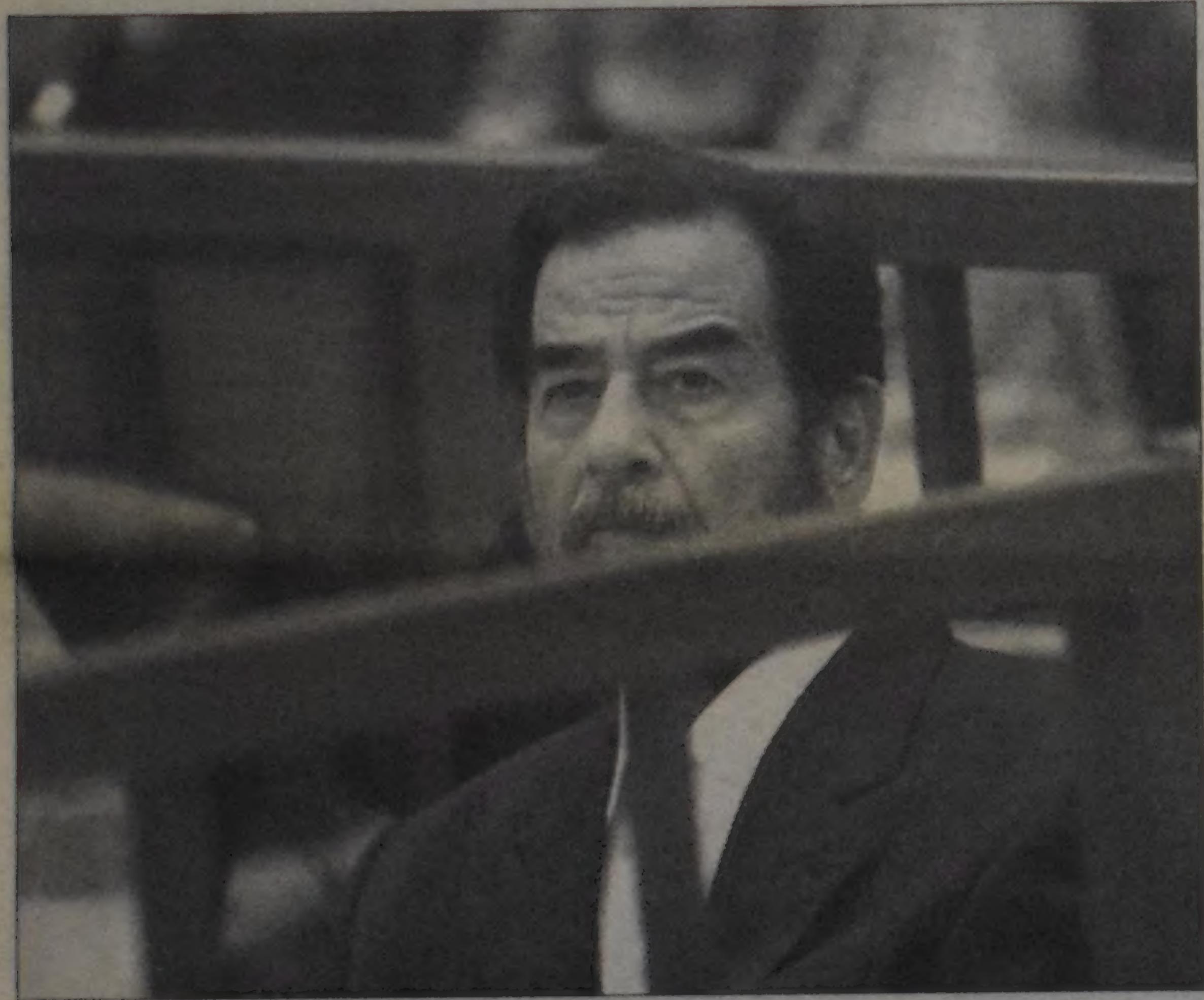
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Saddam: a legacy of violence and fear



Harry der Nederlanden

It should come as no surprise to us that the death of Saddam Hussein was as tawdry and as steeped in violence as his rise to power. Many now say that it was his ruthless tyranny that held the country together in a simulacrum of peace and that suppressed sectarian hatreds, but they forget that that same tyranny also destroyed all mechanisms for creating order except brute force.

The story and the course of Saddam's life almost follow that of a morality play. And his end reminds us of Shakespeare's

Edward II, who abused his power to end up in the castle latrine. From great and gaudy palaces that covered many acres, from dreams of a restored caliphate straddling the fertile crescent, the cradle of civilization (and a major source of oil, the life-blood of our civilization), the Emperor of a future Arab empire ended up in a hole in the ground, and then at the end of a rope, jeered by subjects

who once trembled at the mention of his name.

The tyrant is dead. The source of incredible evil – mass murders, assassinations, wholesale torture, terror and repression – has been eliminated. A costly war was launched, the dictator was toppled, his gargantuan statue destroyed, his huge castles plundered and put to other uses and his regime dismantled. A new government was elected, new laws passed, and yet today many Iraqis wonder whether things weren't better under his regime than they are now.

After all that expenditure of life and wealth, the evil bursting to the surface in the cradle of civilization has not diminished but ballooned to monstrous proportions. Sectarian hatred and other forms of lawlessness have been poured out over Iraq like the plagues of the apocalypse. And it is undeniable that well-intentioned Christian politicians and leaders have been instrumental in unbottling those

plagues. No morality play can make sense of what we have seen happen in Iraq over the last three years. No analysis of tactical errors and strategic blunders made by Washington can explain the crazy bloodlust that has seized segments of the Iraqi population.

In the early hours of the morning immediately after Saddam's execution, shopkeepers along one of the main streets in the Sunni sector looked out to see dozens

of Shiite men dangling by the neck from lamp posts. A macabre parody of justice multiplied: two dozen of yours for one of ours. Of course, Saddam had employed a similar scale of justice. The crime he was tried for was the murder of 148 Shiite men in reprisal for an assassination attempt.

Saddam's origins, of course, were far humbler than those of Edward II. Born to poor peasants,

fatherless, he was raised by an uncle. After serving as a party thug and being forced to flee the country, he rose to power by the same combination of cleverness, ruthless will and inexplicable luck that characterize the careers of earlier tyrants – Josif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili and Adolf Schicklgruber (Stalin and Hitler). Like them he was his own invention. Aparisin Gosh writes:

See Saddam on p. 3 ...

Internship in Sierra Leone: changing lives



By Katie McBride

Literacy, resources, and people

While most newlyweds choose to start their lives together comfortably close to home, Wayne and Joella DeBoer opted for a less conventional beginning. When presented with the opportunity to work on a development project in Sierra Leone for three months as interns sponsored by the Canada

Corps Internship program, these two newly wed students from Redeemer University College jumped at the challenge. As God would have it, this turned out to be a life-changing adventure.

Sierra Leone is a beautiful little country in West Africa with a population of approximately 6 million people. With almost 45 percent of that population being under the age of 15 years old, the need for a well-developed

education system is crucial in order for the country to develop in our quickly progressing world. Although the country is rich in mineral resources such as diamonds, the people are suffering from great poverty. Having been ravaged by a brutal civil war for a decade, until the UN stepped in during 2001, the country endured a great amount of destruction. As portrayed in the recent film *Blood Diamond*.

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Mission

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Diamond the people were terrorized by rebels, many maimed and/or killed. In addition, they were forced to flee from their homes, many of which were burnt to the ground. While this trauma may seem insurmountable, Sierra Leoneans have proved that they are a strong, resilient people. They have made significant progress in rehabilitating their country over the past five years, and are set on keeping the peace. Not only have they shown an incredible strength in pulling their lives back together, many of them radiate an incomprehensible joy.

Because Sierra Leone has suffered so much injustice, since the end of the war a huge amount of foreign aid has been poured into the country in an attempt to improve a large variety of things such as living conditions, healthcare, governance, and education. Inevitably, the devastation of the war involved literacy and education materials being destroyed and scattered about. In response to this, there are currently over 2,800 non-governmentally directed education projects in the works trying to rebuild and improve on what was lost; however, there is little communication between the organizations running the projects.

Similarly, very few of the organizations are in contact with the Ministry of Education, meaning that the government cannot be certain of what measures are needed to continue the development of the country's education system. Their mandate is compromised by the lack of access, and possibilities to monitor, study and direct non-governmental education projects. The lack of communication results in a lack of efficiency. With little communication between organizations, it is inevitable that there will be overlap in their projects; there will be more time, effort, and money spent trying to accomplish the same things. To solve some of these problems, it is important to have a supporting network and database in order to help the Sierra Leone Ministry of Education in their task of informed coordination, development planning, decision making, and policy implementation of language and literacy education. This is where the interns come in.

Though based mainly in the capital city of Freetown for their three month stay, the DeBoer's traveled around the country collecting information from organizations working on literacy and education development projects. They created a network between the non-governmental agencies and the Ministry of Education in order to enable both knowledge and resource sharing. The non-governmentally developed projects are now available to ministry study, assessment and governance. This has been done in the attempt to create transparency concerning the activities of non-governmental agencies that may affect national education interests. Simply stated, all of this is to ensure that everyone is conforming to the same national standards and working together as much as possible in order to obtain the best achievable results.

After much hard work and a lot of cooperation from both government and non-governmental agency workers, Wayne and Joella assembled a large database, recording details of all the literacy and education projects being carried out in Sierra Leone. In addition to the database, they also compiled a library of resources that is now being housed by Milton Margai College of Education and Technology,

just outside of Freetown. It is not just a matter of compiling this information; it is important that it has been organized in such a way that it will be useful. Both the database and the library will serve as a rich resource of materials and information for the Ministry of Education's language and literacy curriculum development, teacher training colleges, and any agencies carrying out projects teaching print literacy and language. Although it will take time for people to become accustomed to the system and really make the most of the resources available, this marks the beginning of a new phase for the facilitation of literacy and education projects in Sierra Leone.

While in Sierra Leone, in addition to their own project, Wayne and Joella DeBoer had the unique opportunity of continuing the work started by interns the previous year. During the fall of 2005, Loreen Deelstra and Katie McBride, two Redeemer University College students spent two and a half months in Sierra Leone developing both a reading primer for young students accompanied by a teaching guide to using the primer, and a cooperative learning teaching manual that will give teachers new, innovative ideas about how to teach large numbers of students with very few resources. The books were printed in Sierra Leone and the DeBoers distributed them to hundreds of teachers and thousands of students, primarily in the Koinadugu district.

The interns were amazed by the sheer warmth and gratitude that continually greeted them as they went from school to school distributing the books. Joella DeBoer noted, "The books were always accepted with enormous amounts of thanks and gratitude. In Canada, you come to have certain expectations about what makes up a school and what is needed for a school to function. Books are one of those things. Unfortunately, it was not uncommon to see children come to school and the only tools they would have for learning would be a pencil and a single sheet of paper. Children and adults alike were absolutely thrilled to finally have materials in the schools." The books are now in use and being translated into five tribal languages.

It was an incredible opportunity for Redeemer University College to send interns to Sierra Leone on interconnected



literacy and education projects two years in a row. They praise the Lord for the funding which gave the interns amazing life experiences and allowed Dr. Kuyvenhoven to continue in the development work that she has dedicated her life to. A professor of education at Redeemer University College, Dr. Kuyvenhoven is the heart behind the projects. It must also be noted that the internships could not have been organized without the meticulous administration of Richard Wikkerink, the university registrar. It was an exciting privilege to be able to contribute to the development of Sierra Leonean education while learning from those Sierra Leoneans dedicated to education. There is still much work to be done, but these projects are important steps in the journey.

News

Saddam ... continued from p. 1

"Like so many tyrants, he was obsessed with his place in history. When he looked in the mirror, he saw a reflection of great men of the ages: Nebuchadnezzar, Hammurabi, Saladin." In fact, Saddam admired and studied the tactics of men like Hitler and Stalin to learn how they stayed in power.

Yet, after the Baath Party seized power in 1968 Saddam was instrumental in leading his country to an unprecedented level of prosperity. He had become second in command by serving as the party's strong man, but after nationalizing the oil industry he employed this wealth to good purpose - building roads, bridges, factories, universities and hospitals. He sought to provide universal health care for Iraqis and made great strides in increasing literacy.

At the same time, of course, he was consolidating his position in the party. In 1979 he pushed the former president aside and assumed the titles of president, prime minister, chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council, secretary general of the Baath Party and commander-in-chief of the armed forces. In the same year he conducted a Stalinist purge that was filmed and televised for the whole country to see. As he sat on the podium before the large assembly of the Baath Party Congress, one by one the names of prominent party members were called out, and one by one they were led out, some pleading for their lives, to be summarily executed. Some of the men had thought themselves his friends.

Amir Taheri, one of the first to describe this paranoid, murderous tyranny, called Iraq under Saddam "the republic of fear," for this arbitrary reign by murder and torture soon extended itself across the entire country. According to one report, every police station in the country was equipped with a "rape room" to terrorize the populace into submission.

Yet, these individual murders pale in comparison to the mass murders and the useless wars into which he led his people. He initiated an eight-year war with Iran that cost thousands of lives and incurred a huge debt, a debt that would later spur him to invade Kuwait to gain more oil revenues. In his war against Iran, as is well-known, he was encouraged and supported by the U.S., which was at loggerheads with Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini.

Because the restive Kurds in the north aligned themselves with Iran, Saddam launched a ruthless campaign against the Kurdish villages using poison gas. An estimated 182,000 people were killed.

Saddam's decline started when he decided to invade oil-rich Kuwait in 1990, but even after the rout of his vaunted army, which he had built into

one of the biggest in the world, the murders did not stop. When, encouraged by the U.S., the Shiites attempted to rebel, he first killed tens of thousands of Shiites and then once again turned his wrath onto the Kurds, forcing an entire people to flee into the mountains.

He became so wedded to the illusion of power that, even though he had dismantled his weapons of mass destruction, he preferred to let his enemies believe he was a mighty, dangerous man rather than to submit to U.N. inspections and to make peace.

The rule of paranoia and fear did not confine itself to the borders of Iraq. Intelligence agencies around the world fell under its thrall and esteemed him to be a much bigger threat than he was. That climate of fear and hatred has not been dispelled with the overthrow of the Baath regime and the execution of its leader. The republic of fear has only been replaced by the republic of mutual terror.

As I write, the question of the day is, Will an infusion of 20,000 extra U.S. troops stop or even slow down the accelerating spiral of sectarian and other violence that threatens to destroy Iraq completely? The overwhelming majority of commentators and ordinary Americans think it is folly. Some think President George W. Bush has simply lost contact with reality, or that he is simply stubborn or determined to save his reputation by extracting some semblance of "victory." But there is something admirable about sticking to a pledge. And when they invaded Iraq, the Americans raised the hopes of many Iraqis that their lives would now be better, and the Bush administration committed to realize that hope.

That hope has faded into disillusionment and fear in centers like Baghdad. But let's not forget that there are areas in Iraq where the reign of fear has been lifted. It's not all unalloyed bad news. Although it seems unlikely that a few thousand American troops can completely suppress the cycles of revenge killings and lawlessness that have been going on, perhaps they can keep other parts of the country from devolving into similar violence.

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Editorial

The cruel God of lepers

Harry der Nederlanden

The Bible, so familiar to most of us, again and again tosses up strange bits. Living with the Bible is a bit like living along the ocean. You become familiar with this huge body of water and with the waves rolling ashore at regular intervals, and then suddenly the waves wash up something you've never noticed before.

Recently our pastor preached on Jesus' healing of the leper. To give some background to the account in Matthew, he went back to Leviticus and to the rules laid down by Scripture in Old Testament times for lepers. They are quite elaborate. Lepers had to live apart, of course, and to warn others to keep their distance. So the rules in Leviticus are usually interpreted as a prescientific way of dealing with a very contagious disease. They are the equivalent of contemporary measures, such as those used against SARS, to keep the disease from flaring up into an epidemic and infecting the entire community.

But as I reread the rules in Leviticus, I thought, "These rules go much further than that." The rules seem designed to deepen and to aggravate the humiliation and isolation of the victim. The leper is commanded to dress in ragged clothes, to cry out "Unclean, unclean!" wherever he goes, and he is forced to live in isolation "outside the camp." Moreover, an entire ritual of sacrifices becomes associated with the disease, including sin offerings and trespass offerings, and anyone cured of the disease has to perform a large array of rituals to be accepted back into the community. The leper is not simply treated as a sick person; he is declared *unclean*. That word says it all. He is not treated with love and respect, but turned into an outcast, an *untouchable*, a horror, an *Unmensch*.

Contrast this with how we treat the diseased today. We do everything we can to include them in the community (at least in our rhetoric) and to see that they are cared for. Above all, we are careful not to stigmatize the sick. We are careful to stress that it is not their fault that they are sick, and that they are just like us. The medical establishment, in fact, has been anxious to label as diseases certain conditions – alcoholism, drug addiction, depression – that once carried a stigma because doing so will tend to remove that stigma.

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Enlightened people do not treat sick people as if they were "unclean" – as if they were at fault or as if their disease allied them with some sort of evil thing. Disease, we have learned, is nothing more than a breakdown of the body that can happen to anyone. It is morally neutral, as it were.

What happens to the leper in the prescriptions of Leviticus is the opposite of what we consider humane. It is no wonder that the casual, critical reader of the Bible is often repelled by the Old Testament. If these prescriptions are from God, doesn't this make him a cruel God?

But similar questions, I think, should arise in our minds – at least they did in mine as I sat in the pew. (No, I didn't miss the rest of the sermon as my mind wandered.) In Matthew we see Jesus announcing the coming of the Kingdom, and one of the big signs of that coming Kingdom is his healing of the sick and the lame. But we are taught that the plot that unites the Bible from Genesis to Revelation is precisely the coming of the Kingdom. It is the history of redemption. And the prescriptions of Leviticus are similarly signs of the Kingdom, a Kingdom in which love and justice will embrace all.

So, what's with the lepers? The biblical prescriptions deepen and aggravate their suffering and their isolation. The leprosy isn't treated as a mere illness, it becomes freighted with much, much more. The lepers are burdened not just by their horrible disease but they are turned into symbols of human pollution and sin. Their condition is turned into a virtual gehenna or hell. They are labeled as refuse and consigned to the garbage dump outside the city gates. They may no longer live among "us" and have become as a no-people.

That is cruel, isn't it? How much of the goodness and the comfort of God's redeeming love did those poor lepers experience? How can a good and loving God be the author of such drastic measures?

But such questions arise in many other connections in the Old Testament. Reading with the benefit of hindsight, through the prism of God's heart in Jesus Christ, we often read over the harshness, anticipating where it all leads. But the Old Testament stories often leave me wondering, How much of God's goodness and salvation did those people actually experience in their lives? Was it all 'not yet'? Of course, in the present too terrible things befall even those who belong to God's people – terrible enough to make them wonder whether they aren't living in hell.

But what is visited on the lepers is a little different – it is not just the horror of the disease but the cruel aggravation of that horror by those who speak in the name of God, the priests.

But is it cruel of God to reveal to us the nature of our condition? This may go directly against the grain of the therapeutic society and against the slogan, "I'm okay, you're okay." But the fact is that the medical labeling of disease may be a sort of cover-up. It blinds us to the fact that disease is a consequence and sign of our fallenness, our alienation from God, and that it is part of our pollution, our spiritual disease.

In other words, the Levitical prescriptions do not just turn this dreadful disease into a symbol of a spiritual condition, they reveal the root and the essence of the disease. It is not just a virus or a skin condition. No disease is simply a physical thing. To point out its spiritual nature is not to "spiritualize" it; in fact, to spiritualize something should mean to reveal its cosmic context and meaning sub species aeternitas.

Our pastor pointed out that when Jesus healed the leper, he didn't say, "Be healed!" He said, "Be clean!" Furthermore, he tells the leper to go through all the religious rigamarole commanded by Moses. In other words, Jesus does not declare the Old Testament status of leprosy and disease to have been superseded by his coming into the world.

But at this point in Jesus' ministry, the story is, of course, not finished. Something much more remarkable is in the offing than the healing of a single leper. When Jesus is led out of Jerusalem, he is led outside the camp, he is led into gehenna, and he becomes a leper for all who are lepers – and that includes all of us.

This radically redefines disease for us. Several years ago I was found to have colon cancer. I didn't experience it simply as a malfunction of body cells. Part of the disease is the fear of death and all that this entails – abandoning those you love, questioning the meaning of life and so on. Disease still has deep spiritual implications. But because Christ became a leper for us, and because he defeated sin and death and disease, these no longer mean the same thing. They are no longer the same thing. They are no longer to be feared as representing the destruction of things and the annihilation of life, love and meaning.

When you look over the biblical story of redemption, you see all sorts of basic human things, from sexuality, parent-child relationships, passing on ones heritage to national identity and wars drawn into a similar pattern.

Israel as God's chosen people was not plunked into a land flowing with milk and honey to live there happily ever after. Israel's history is a history of suffering. Again and again the Israelites are led into exile from the land of promise, and even now they are far from enjoying the sweet fulfillment of God's covenant promises. Think of Abraham, the one to whom the promises of the covenant were first spelled out: how long he and Sarah had to wait to see even one tiny seed of that promise spring to life. Was God being cruel? Is showing life's realities to those you love cruel?

Abraham and Israel are not simply given additional or more accurate information about God. They are not simply given a better, higher moral code than the surrounding nations. They are drafted into God's New Creation Project.

The biblical story, as N. T. Wright pointed out in a recent speech given at Calvin College, is not first of all a better theology or better moral teaching or an escape from the harsh facts of this earthly existence. But it shows us that Jesus has transformed the very fundamental facts and conditions of this life. In Jesus we are ushered into a new reality and, like Israel, we become agents, vehicles, carriers of this cosmic transformation.

Instead of being carriers of the contagion of disease, we become carriers of God's love and of his shalom. But when we are grafted into the mission of Jesus Christ and mobilized as the vanguard of his Kingdom, this is not a burden without suffering. However, that suffering itself has been transformed, for it is no longer a sign of death, but of resurrection and of the new heaven and the new earth that is coming.

Go, Jesus says, My blood has made you clean.

Islam and the Jews

The offence of the Zionist Jew in the Middle East

Hans Jansen

In 1974 Golda Meir wrote in her autobiography *My Life*: "I have never doubted that the real intent of the Arab states was and is the total annihilation of Israel. Even if we had withdrawn to the borders of 1967, they would have attempted to wipe us out."

Some 30 years later not much has changed. On Oct. 26, 2005 Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the president of Iran, said: "The state of Israel must not only be destroyed, but it must be erased from the map!" He has repeated this many times since, also at the end of the controversial holocaust conference in Tehran.

Why is the Arab world so deaf to his statements? Because he neatly repeats the dominant ideas of Islamic academics, politicians and religious leaders in the Middle East, who also feel that Israel has no right of existence. The idea that the destruction of the state of Israel is envisioned only by terrorist groups like Hezbollah and Hamas is a naive misconception of Western politicians.

Why is the conviction that Israel must ultimately be wiped from the map such a widespread conviction among Muslims in the Middle East (we have in mind academics, professors, students, politicians, imams, lawyers, journalists, columnists, cartoonists and producers in radio and television)?

European fears

With the rise of the Zionist movement and especially at the beginning of the state of Israel, the traditional image of the Jew in the world undergoes a revolutionary transformation. The first thing we notice is that Jews begin to become a problem: as in 19th century Europe, the "Jewish question" arises in the Middle East. The Jew emerges as a dark shadow, as the thing that threatens the entire Islamic world in the Middle East. Traditional hostilities, contempt and suspicions continue, but the typical European fear of Jews, which always haunts the non-Jewish world, now becomes the fear of Muslims in the Middle East. The Jew is no longer the insignificant, powerless schemer of the traditional stereotype. In the Muslim world he becomes the incarnation of cosmic evil, the incarnation of the devil. The Jew is seen as the henchman of Satan, always colluding against humanity.

Puppets

With the establishment of the Jewish National Homeland in Palestine (1917), Arab writing increasingly begins to depict Zionism as the bulwark of Western imperialism. But after the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 and especially after the Six Day War of 1967, America, England and Europe are depicted as helpless puppets of the Zionists, who envision nothing less than world rule via the conquest of the Middle East.

Ever since, this revolutionary transformation in the traditional image of the powerless Jew has determined not only political

discussion in the countries surrounding Israel but the content of their literature, art, religion and scientific disciplines right to the present.

We encounter this new image of the Jew in polemical writings and in marginal publications, but also in extensive articles in dailies and magazines, as well as in radio and television programs. It also makes its appearance in school books and in the handbooks used in the universities.

Bernard Lewis, the dean of Middle East scholarship, estimates that in terms of virulent hatred of the Jews contemporary Islamic literature exceeds that of European antisemitic literature. To find parallels from other times with modern Islamic antisemitism, Lewis has to turn to the writings of the Inquisition in Spain, to writings around the Dreyfus Affair in France, to publications of the Black Hundred in Russia and to "Der Stuermer" of Julius Streicher in Germany.

Contemporary Islamic hatred toward Jews is of European origin according to Lewis and many others. Islamic antisemites legitimize their hatred by pointing to classical antisemitic writings imported from Europe.

Bestsellers are *The Talmud Jew* by August Rohling and since the 1950s *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Centers have been established in several Arab lands, especially in Egypt and Lebanon, that spread antisemitic literature all over the world.

For Muslim politicians and diplomats, the humiliating defeat of the Six Day War was impossible to harmonize with the traditional image of the powerless Jew. Their reaction was typical. Arab foreign ministers met for weeks with their counterparts in the Soviet Union to confer about the decisions that the UN Security Council should take.

Later one of the Arab ambassadors reported: "We Arabs called the Six Day War a setback.... The Soviet Union's foreign minister repeatedly intervened to correct us and to say, 'No, this was not a setback – you Arabs have suffered a defeat. The only thing to do is to acknowledge this.'"

But, reported the Arab ambassador, "We, the governments of the defeated countries in the Middle East, would have none of it. No, let me correct myself: we could not accept the facts."

Clashing images

These historical facts are still not accepted by Muslim politicians. They found political developments in the Middle East since 1948 in which the Jew triumphed impossible to rhyme with the reigning image of the Jew. For centuries he had been depicted in Islamic literature as an enemy, a coward, a braggart



Street in Jerusalem

The realization of the Zionist project, considered utopian by most European Jews before the Second World War, enabled the Jews in the entire Middle East to put far behind them their dhimmi status (as protected second-class citizens) and to seize their independence.

Arab Muslims, a proud and dominant group, were deeply shocked simply and solely by the fact that this protected minority

and even as a whore, but as someone who never posed any sort of threat to Islam. But suddenly here was the Zionist Jew. He not only demanded a Jewish state, but inspired by a nationalist ideology, in 1948 he managed to create one.

In the war for independence, the Zionist Jew achieved a military triumph over those who had been his protectors and masters for centuries, and who could be called tolerant in comparison to European Christianity. These events could only evoke deep wrath among Muslims in the Middle East.

More annexations

The Israeli historian, Robert Wistrich writes: "Muslims in the Middle East have experienced the fact that a people of dhimmis subject to Islamic authority for centuries succeeded in erecting a sovereign state in the heart of the Arab world as an intolerable blow to their pride. This is why the Arab countries launched their first holy war in 1948 to stop the establishment of the state of Israel. This blow to Arab pride was deepened when they lost not just this war but four subsequent wars, and when Israel annexed even more Palestinian territory as a result of these wars."

no longer wanted to accept their status under their condescending, semi-contemptuous, semi-tolerant masters.

Muslims charge that the Jews are no longer willing to acknowledge their place in the Islamic world. The unexpected metamorphosis of the contemptible, powerless, humiliated and subject Jew into a triumphant Zionist who is a threat to Muslim society has precipitated a break – a theological, sociological, economic and political break – in ancient Islamic tradition. And this break cannot be tolerated.

This image of the Zionist Jew is reinforced every day by feelings of outrage and anger at the occupation and plunder of the Arab Holy Land (Palestine) by Israel. The metamorphosis of the Jew into a Zionist is felt to the present day to be an endless provocation and scandal – because it challenges the superiority of Islam.

On April 25, 1972, the birthday of Muhammad, then-president Sadat of Egypt expressed his astonishment at the chaos Israel had caused in the Middle East. "We will not only liberate our land, but we will also wipe out Israel's pretensions, so that the Jews will return to the status they formerly

Continued on page 6...

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Ecotourism

Tourists and travelers

Eternal Student

Peter Schuurman



Belize city pier

"All the world is a book, and he who never travels has only read one page," said St. Augustine. I wonder what St. Augustine would say if you took him onto a 747 and did a round-the-world tour together. He might append his first quote: "And if you flip through too many pages too quickly, you have little idea what you're reading."

Students and families are making plans for their Spring break/reading break and I'm thinking about the options. Unfortunately, for many vacation has become synonymous with consumption and spectacle. To think of vacation and education, let alone stewardship at the same time becomes quite a feat.

I read recently that United Nations declared 2002 the "Year of International Ecotourism." Now we could be very cynical about this – I've heard it re-named "egotourism" and "ecomarketing" – and there is no doubt that profiteers take advantage of whatever they can to make a buck. But there are forms of ecotourism that seem to offer a genuine alternative.

The Other Side of Paradise

I've never been on an official "ecotour" myself, but I like to think of myself and my wife as discerning travelers who share many of the concerns. For example, unlike the stated purpose of many short-term missions, ecotourism is primarily an educational tour. The goal is to learn about another culture and its land and to minimize the negative impact that money and masses can have on that culture and its land. As one web

Alltun Ha
in Belize

Peter Schuurman is the Christian Reformed Education Mission Leader and resides in Guelph, Ontario.

Offence ... continued from p. 5

possessed in the Middle East under us. For our book, the Quran, clearly spells out this status: 'It is their destiny to live in humiliation and misery.'"

There is but one acceptable solution, from this perspective: the Jews must reassume their old, traditional status of a protected and humiliated minority. The situation created by the Zionists is seen as a "contamination", a "defilement", a "pollution" of the whole of Islamic life and society in the Middle East. The new order is dangerous because everything has been knocked out of place, and this "contamination" can spread: the Zionists will annex more and more land.

Collapsing cosmos

Ahmed Ben Bella, the first president of independent Algeria, said in an interview: "Arabs will never accept the Zionist entity. The Arab people, Arab genius will never be able to tolerate the Zionist state. If we accepted the Zionists, this would imply that we also recognize non-Arabs. We will always seek to expel this foreign body from our region. Israel is truly a cancerous growth sown in the Arab world. What we, the rest of the Arabs, want is simply to be there [in Palestine]. But we cannot be there if the others (in this case the Zionists) are there too. If the Jews would be satisfied with their former subject status, we will not drive them into the sea."

Such reactions are reminiscent of the situation in India, where the revolt of a formerly inferior caste is experienced as such a radical rupture of the structure of society that the whole cosmos seems about to collapse.

To this very day Arab (Islamic) heads of state, imams, professors and journalists in Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Saudi-Arabia, Gaza and Lebanon react with deep outrage and unrestrained anger.

Roles have been reversed. After Muslims have ruled over powerless and humiliated Jews in the Middle East for over twelve centuries, now those same powerless, humiliated Jews rule over Muslims (in the occupied territories but actually in the entire Middle East). Muslims have been deeply shocked in their religious convictions. They are frustrated and traumatized.

This is also the deepest explanation for the fact that, after making their peace treaty with Israel, Egypt and Jordan did not let up on their hate campaigns against Israel but escalated them; that the Palestinians never initiated a peace; that all initiatives from Israel, the U.S., the U.N., the E.U. and Russia (the Oslo Accords, the Road Map and the Geneva Accord) came to naught; that all the ministers of Hamas clearly stated that their government would never recognize Israel; and that president Mahmoud Abbas would never ask the members of his unity cabinet to recognize the state of Israel.

Another factor that complicates the relationship between Jews and Muslims is the issue of land. A few years ago Bernard Lewis said, "No Muslim will ever definitively relinquish a claim on land that was once added to the Islamic empire." Why not?

Muhammed made his first treaty (dhimma) with the Jews of Khaybar in Medina in 628. After the conquest of the city Muhammed is alleged to have said: "The land belongs to Allah and his messengers." After his death wars of conquest were fought on three continents and huge territories were annexed and Arabized, Islamicized and colonized. Islam

Stewardship

Offence ... continued from p. 6

was the largest colonial expansion in the history of the human race, unfolding in two waves. The first between 640 and 750 colonized all the countries around the Mediterranean, and between 1021 and 1689 the Turks took over.

It is a political and legal dogma, rooted in Islamic theology, that annexed lands are appropriated and that defeated people become the property of the conquerors. These are rights given to Muslims by Allah himself.

The legal texts that elaborate on this statement are numerous. To cite one example: "Palestine is called *fai* because in 638 Allah took this land from the unbelieving Jews and restored it to the Muslims. In principle Allah created this land so that the faithful would serve him with it. Since the unbelievers (the Jews) do not serve Allah in Palestine, so he gave it to believing Muslims."

Inalienable possession

The four major legal schools of Islam (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, Hanbali) all greatly expand on Muhammad's statement ("The land belongs to Allah and his messengers"). They all develop the thesis of the almost infallible *umma*, the worldwide Muslim communion. This is based on the Quran 3:104: "And from among you there should be a party who invite to good and enjoin what is right and forbid the wrong, and these it is that shall be successful." [There are various translations. Jansen has: "You have become the best nation, brought forth for the good of humanity because you incite to decency and forbid what is wrong, and you believe in God."]

In the Middle East, where the *umma* is almost accepted as dogma, common opinion holds that since 638 Palestine is the inalienable property of the worldwide Muslim communion. Since according to the holy texts jihad is the fulfilment of the holy will of Allah, it is the beginning of an irreversible process of Arabizing and Islamicizing lands conquered by Islam, particularly

of the land of Palestine.

As a consequence, every reversal of jihad – such as the conquest of national territory by Israel in 1948 – is an act of blasphemy, an attack on the holiness of Allah, and a frustration of his holy will. This means that Allah is hereby denigrated, mocked, reviled and dishonored, for according to the will of Allah and his holy law the Arab-Islamic people are superior to the inferior Jewish people.

A nation without land

The conquest of Palestine, the homeland of the Jewish people, which became an Arab colony in 638 through jihad, condemned the Jewish people to forever be a nation without land. At that time, the Jewish people, threatened with extinction, had the choice of fleeing into exile or remaining in their homeland to live in misery and humiliation, subject to the will of their Islamic rulers. The defeated nation, robbed of its political rights, was doomed to complete powerlessness. Its language and culture, its norms and values were displaced by the Arab metropolis. The cities were taken over by an Arab population, and the national identity of the Jewish people was radically erased. Only a tolerated religion remained. Never again would it be able to claim land in Islamic territory.

What is the core of the problem? In September of last year, the French philosopher Bernard-Henri Levy, the great advocate of freedom and human values, said: "The Islamic world needs an aggiornamento, a renewal. And it is true that this will only come if the Islamic texts are truly read critically and if dogmas are open for discussion. This is the core of the problem: either the Quran remains untouched and we are headed for a catastrophe, or we accept the idea that the text lives only by virtue of commentary and constant reconsideration. Only then will a new day break for Islam."

Executors

So you were asked to act as Executor for a relative or a friend. You said, "Sure!" But are you aware what you just committed to?

Officially, your responsibility is to administer your relative or friend's estate – and to carry out the instructions as expressed in their Will. It is a specific role of stewardship. As an executor/executrix, you control all aspects of their estate and are accountable for your stewardship to the beneficiaries outlined in the Will.

Here are some of the things an executor/executrix will have to deal with:

Providing for immediate needs: finding and reviewing the most recent Will; arranging the funeral; and determining if any family members have immediate financial needs.

Identifying and protecting assets until they are finally distributed, such as vacant house or property, personal valuables and documents, club memberships that need to be cancelled, health insurance, subscriptions, credit cards, etc. You will also need to ensure that adequate property insurance exists in the interim.

Evaluating the estate: household goods, furniture, artwork, vehicles, other personal effects, insurance policies, pension plans and preparation of a detailed inventory of assets and liabilities.

Settling tax issues: In Canada there are no direct death duties, however, there are tax implications, that is, a determination of capital gains at the time of death, filing the final income tax returns, and requesting clearance certificates.

Arranging for probating the Will, settling all claims and debts, investing surplus cash and managing the investments to ensure that enough money is available to pay income tax and other liabilities.

Discharging all bank or private loans and mortgages, pay any legacies and other bequests.

Distributing all remaining personal property to the beneficiaries according to the wishes expressed in the Will.

Given the importance of the role the Executor plays, here are some things you might consider when you are selecting someone to fill this role for you:

Reflections on Stewardship

Rick De Graaf

Choose someone who:

- Shares your faith, is trustworthy and agrees with your wishes.
- Has the capabilities necessary to perform the duties required. A professional Executor may best handle large or complex estates.
- Is likely to outlive you.
- Is nearby so that duties may be performed without inconvenience or delay.
- Is impartial: if you anticipate controversy, choose someone other than a family member.
- Has expressed his willingness and is prepared to take on this responsibility.

Keep in mind that an Executor will incur expenses in carrying out these tasks of stewardship. Canadian law allows compensation of up to 5 per cent of the value of the estate and a 0.2 per cent yearly care and management fee. If, however, there is conflict about this from any of the beneficiaries, the courts will establish a "fair and reasonable compensation".

The above information is also available as an 'Info-bulletin' from CSS.

Stewardly Tip: Keep important information in a secure but handy place – so your loved ones know where to find it when your journey on earth is ended. Your Executor should also know where that is. Include the location of the Will, important information such as your lawyer, credit cards, accounts with passwords, insurance policies, tax information etc. CSS can provide an information sheet that lists the information you should record and keep in a safe place.

Readers: Share your Stewardly Tips so that we all can make better use of the resources God has entrusted to us. Submit your suggestions (by mail to *Christian Courier* or by email to my address below) and provide your contact information so that we can acknowledge your contribution or ask you for more details.

Next issue: Quantity & Motive

Rick DeGraaf works for Christian Stewardship Services in Markham, Ontario. Rick's email: rickd@csservices.ca



Dr. J.G.B. Jansen is a theologian, historian and expert in antisemitism. He is associated with the Simon Wiesenthal Institute in Brussels. He is the author of *Van jodenhaat naar zelfmoordterrorisme* [From Antisemitism to Suicide Terrorism]. This article first appeared in the Dutch newspaper Trouw and is reprinted here with permission.

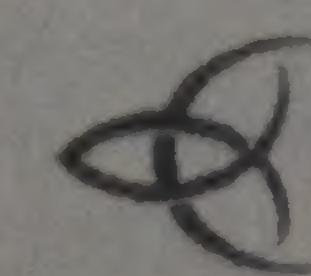
Inside Lebanese mosque

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Church

An African archbishop finds common ground in Virginia



Archbishop Rowan Williams greets Archbishop Peter Akinola, (left) Primate of Nigeria, at Lambeth Palace

Sarah Simpson

ABUJA, NIGERIA—Anglican Archbishop of Nigeria Peter Akinola says it's no accident that he, an African, has become the outspoken leader of Anglican traditionalists worldwide. God has always looked to Africa to save his church, he says.

When Christ sought safety from Herod, he found it in Egypt, in Africa, and when he was completely worn out, an African carried his cross, according to Akinola.

"God is consistent: He has always used Africans to build his church, to save his church from error. Right from the very beginning," says Mr. Akinola, dressed in the traditional garb of his Yoruba ethnic group, a large wooden cross hanging from his neck. "Africans are always there to do it!"

Best known for his vocal opposition to homosexuality, Akinola has found support among US Anglicans, or Episcopalians, who opposed the 2003 consecration of a gay bishop and the church's move to allow dioceses to bless same-sex unions.

Last month, two of America's oldest Episcopal churches — both in Virginia — voted to break with the US branch of Anglicanism over the issue and concerns about church leaders' adherence to biblical authority. These churches, and several other smaller churches, joined the Convocation of Anglicans in North America, which is connected to Akinola.

"Homosexuality seeks to destroy marriage as we know it, unity as we know it, family life as we know it, so how can we endorse that?" asks Akinola. "That is completely outside what God planned for humanity. When God created man, he saw man was alone and added a female mate for him. Why didn't he pick one of the baboons, one of the lions to make his partner? He could have done so. He didn't," he says. "Homosexuality is nothing short of sinning against God with impunity — as you are going against his will."

Akinola says his views are not controversial, he is simply a traditionalist adhering to Scripture with the full support of his bishops and congregation. He says he "abhors" what he describes as the "extreme liberalism of the Western world." The debate on homosexual bishops is a symptom of that extreme liberalism and is contrary to biblical teachings, he says.

"In Africa, the gay issue is a taboo a no-go area. But that does not mean there are no gays," says Akinola, his words tumbling out fast and loud. "We have gays in Africa, too."

"But the key difference is that we don't celebrate it. Because for us it is contrary to our African culture, it is contrary to our Africa way of life and it is contrary to nature. And from a Christian point of view it is contrary to God's word, to the Scripture," he says.

Tradition of tolerance tested?

The Anglican Communion has practiced, from its earliest days, compromise and embracing theological differences of each constituency. But on a number of occasions over the last three years, Akinola has threatened to leave the Communion, which is headed by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Ian Douglas, professor of Mission and World Christianity at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Mass., says that the Anglican Communion's tradition of inclusion is being put to the test.

"Part of the problem with the Anglican community today is that the different constituencies are so convinced of their own truth, that they say they have no need of others — and that goes against Anglican tradition," the Rev. Mr. Douglas says.

But the current divisions are not all one sided, says Douglas. Traditionalists like Akinola are digging their heels in, but so are the Western liberals that Akinola derides.

"The global South is speaking out of its postcolonial reality and wants to assert its position vis-à-vis the West," says Douglas, "At the same time, gay and lesbian communities and women want to assert their own position in their societies."

"For me it's heartbreaking to see groups that potentially share such commonality going at each other's throats," says Douglas.

Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, with 140 million people, is roughly split between Christians and Muslims. The two groups often clash in the streets leaving hundreds dead. Akinola has repeatedly justified his position as a defense of the faith in the face of what he describes as Nigeria's own brand of "militant" Islam.

Akinola supports new legislation before the Nigerian government which could, if passed, prohibit same-sex relationships including public displays of affection between same-sex couples. The bill, which the US State Department warns could



National Ecumenical Centre in Abuja

KEVIN O'ROURKE

infringe basic human rights, has so far failed to stir any controversy in Nigeria.

Akinola's rise to prominence was shaped, in part, by Nigeria's post-colonial tumult. Akinola was born in southwestern Nigeria in 1944. At that time, Britain was the colonial power and, like most southerners living close to the ports and European influences, Akinola was raised in Christianity.

The death of his father when Akinola was only four limited family resources and forced Akinola to drop out of school early and learn a trade, as a carpenter.

Akinola's path to prominence

A career in the church was an unusual choice, says Akinola. In 1960, the year Nigeria gained independence, Akinola was 16 and the newly oil-rich country was buzzing with opportunity and the "hunt for money," as Akinola says.

By the time he joined the Anglican priesthood in his early 20s, Akinola had set up successful businesses selling furniture and medicine. And though he left the classroom early, he completed his high school education by taking correspondence courses.

Akinola continued his studies within the church. Shortly after being ordained into the Anglican priesthood, Akinola attended the Virginia Theological Seminary in the US before returning to Nigeria in the early 1980s.

By 1991, Nigeria's port city and original capital, Lagos, had grown so large, unmanageable, and dangerous that military leader Ibrahim Babangida, fearful of assassination, turned his back on the city and carved out a new federal capital in the heart of the forest. It was to this new capital, Abuja, among the bulldozers and empty plots, that Akinola was posted to establish an Anglican presence upon his return to Nigeria.

Akinola counts his establishment of a strong Anglican congregation in Abuja as one of his greatest successes. And as Bishop of Abuja, he has built the National

Ecumenical Centre, the main church for all Nigeria's 20 million Anglicans.

As Akinola approaches his 63rd birthday in late January, he bubbles with the energy that fueled his rise to Archbishop of Nigerian Anglicans in 2000. He moves fast, talks fast, and says he doesn't tolerate tardiness or excuses.

Akinola feels he has accomplished much with relatively little. "It's not by might or by power, [as a priest] you have no police to arrest anybody you have no army with their weapons to fight anybody — all you have is to talk," he says, sitting on a sofa in the air-conditioned calm of his Abuja office.

The church stands atop a hill in the capital, its new angular arches cut a crisp bright figure among the highways and office blocks of the city. President Olusegun Obasanjo, a Baptist, officially opened the church in October.

On Dec. 25, Akinola gave his Christmas Day message from a lectern on the church's rotating altar. As the instrument of God, he says, he does not shy away from any subject, including politics. His sermon included calls for Nigerians to register ahead of this year's crucial presidential elections — balloting meant to cement the transition to civilian rule — and called for the people to be "God-conscious in casting their votes."

Unlike in many rich Western countries, religion and faith remain central to many people's lives in Nigeria. In the country's Christian south, churches the size of football stadiums are packed every weekend with worshipers.

Amid the rattle and hum of portable generators on Abuja's Wuse market, shoppers leafing through Christian books and Bibles variously describe homosexuality as "evil" and an "abomination."

"We are very conservative here in Nigeria," says Norma Obazele, who describes herself as a devout Christian and declined to give her age. "Homosexuality is wrong, it's from the devil."

Church

They're being drummed into church

A new study shows that the fastest-growing churches boast more men, less reverence, and percussion during worship.

G. Jeffrey MacDonald

Churches with rising attendance numbers have a lot in common with one another – a lot more than denomination, location, or even theological approach. According to a new study, success stories often involve men, drums, a joyful environment, and a concerted effort not to be too “reverent.”

That's the conclusion of a report from the Hartford Institute for Religion Research, a nonprofit research group at Hartford Seminary in Hartford, Conn. While most US churches continue to be predominantly of one race and to count more women than men in their pews, the HIRR survey of almost 900 congregations found growth is most likely when:

- A church is multiracial.
- Men make up at least 60 percent of regular participants.
- Leaders describe worship as “slightly to not at all” reverent.
- Drums or percussion are always used in worship.

Such innovations make churches exciting places to be, says report author Kirk Hadaway. It also explains why atypical churches, which are prone to innovate, often lead the pack in growth, he adds.

“If it's not uplifting, interesting, provoking ... it's perfectly acceptable in American society to not go [to church] anymore,” says Mr. Hadaway, director of research for the Episcopal Church USA. “Churches that are providing a more uplifting worship experience and community are those that are growing. And those that do it well are not typical anymore.”

For many congregations, learning to grow is a matter of survival. Six mainline denominations, all of which have been losing members for 40 years, saw worship attendance figures drop by as much as 12 percent between 1999 and 2004, according to a November report from the Presbyterian Church (USA). The United Methodist Church (UMC) lost about 34,000 weekly worshipers, or 1 percent, from 2004 to 2005.

“We have a sense of mission to reach new people with the Gospel and to minister to people's needs – that's why we exist – and



we realize that we're failing in our mission,” says John Southwick, director of research for the General Board of Global Ministries for the UMC. “We need to turn the ship around, and that means to start growing again.”

For stagnant or declining congregations, Hadaway says, the new findings, based on data collected in 2005, offer hope because churches can usually cultivate at least a few attributes correlated with growth. But, church experts caution, this prescription for growth won't work if a congregation doesn't also lay the necessary groundwork.

“You cannot simply introduce tactics in worship design and hope to increase the number of males or become more cross-cultural,” says Thomas Bandy, president of Easum, Bandy & Associates, a Texas-based church-growth consultancy. “It requires a certain kind of leader” to build consensus and trustworthy spiritual authority, or else other changes in congregational life become mere superficialities.

What's more, according to Bandy and Hadaway, changing a congregation's attributes often creates stress and conflict, which HIRR found to be the No. 1 factor when attendance takes a dive.

But perhaps the bigger danger in racing to emulate growing churches is losing sight of more primary priorities, according to theologian Philip Kenneson.

“I don't think there are any bonuses just for getting people in the door,” says Mr. Kenneson, an associate professor at Milligan College in Tennessee and co-author of *Selling Out the Church: The Dangers of Church Marketing*. “I want my children to be formed by a community of believers [that shape] a certain kind of people. It's not enough to just be there being counted.”

Still, atypical congregations of many

stripes are counting their blessings as new worshipers beef up the flock's ranks. On the liberal side, gay-friendly Metropolitan Community Church of Toronto recently hosted the largest Christmas Eve service in Canada with nearly 2,500 attendees. With

more than 30 ethnic groups represented in the pews, the congregation expects to keep building its average weekly attendance from 580 today to about 875 within the next three years.

More-conservative congregations are also benefiting from ethnic diversity and joyful environs. Granger Community Church, a drum-loving congregation near South Bend, Ind., has seen weekly attendance grow from about 2,000 in 2000 to 5,700 in 2006. First Baptist Church of Wheaton, Md., has boosted average weekly attendance over the past four years from 190 to about 225, an 18 percent gain. Bringing minority

faces up front to lead songs and prayer has helped make the church 50 percent nonwhite, according to Larry White, minister of spiritual formation. Another plus: Professional musicians, including a drummer, have helped increase the ranks of young adults.

“The universal language of rock 'n' roll sets the stage for people of many different backgrounds to be comfortable in our setting,” Mr. White says. Although electric guitars have turned off some older members, White says, most have been willing to tolerate it as an important drawing card for younger newcomers.

In some cases, old-fashioned pastoral care still wins attendees. When newcomers visit Assembly of God Brazilian Church, a growing Pentecostal congregation in Abington, Mass., lay evangelist Fausto de Rocha follows up with a home visit. There, he prays with them. If they don't speak English, he makes calls to set up phone and cable television service. The church also offers language classes and helps newcomers find jobs.

“These are immigrants far away from their home and the love they knew there,” Mr. de Rocha says. But they tend to relax, he says, around top-notch singers, horns, and drums at Sunday services.

G. Jeffrey MacDonald is a correspondent of The Christian Science Monitor

South Sudan church leaders want secession agreement implemented

By Fredrick Nzwili

Nairobi (ENI) – Two years after the signing of a peace agreement to end a 21-year-long civil war in Sudan, some church leaders in south Sudan are urging eventual secession for their region, saying Khartoum has failed to make unity attractive.

“The north was supposed to make unity attractive through the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), but this has not happened. I can confirm that we [the south] will become autonomous,” the Rev. Santino Maurino, deputy general secretary of the Sudan Catholic Bishop's Regional Conference told Ecumenical News International in Nairobi on January 10. “We've been suffering. We did not go to war for nothing. We want to be autonomous to shape our development and progress.”

Signed on January 9, 2005 between the government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), the CPA ended one of Africa's longest and bloodiest conflicts, which pitted the mainly Christian and animist south against the Muslim north.

The agreement gave south Sudan a six-year period of administrative autonomy,

after which the population can decide in a referendum about secession.

Salva Kiir, the president of south Sudan, clashed publicly with the Sudan's President Omar Bashir during the second anniversary on January 9 of the CPA in Juba, south Sudan's biggest town. Kiir accused the central government of backing rebel groups in the south to frustrate the implementation of the agreement.

“We agree with Kiir. But there are also all kinds of problems, tribalism, nepotism, corruption and others which we cannot ignore,” said Maurino.

On January 8, Christian Aid, the International Rescue Committee, Oxfam and the International Save the Children Alliance said in a statement that the CPA implementation had slipped heavily behind schedule, with international attention focused on a separate conflict in the Darfur region in western Sudan.

“The slow progress in implementing the agreement is extremely worrying. If there isn't active support for the peace process, there's a risk of renewed fighting,” said Patty Swahn, the International Rescue Committee's regional director for the Horn of Africa.



News

North Korea escalates 'cult of Kim' to counter West's influence

In a time of famine and poverty, nearly 40 percent of the country's budget is spent on Kim-family deification.

Robert Marquand

SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA — North Koreans are taught to worship Kim Jong Il as a god. In a manner unique among nations, the North exerts extraordinary control through deification — a cult ideology of complete subservience — that goes beyond the "Stalinist" label often used to describe the newly nuclear North.

While outsiders can see film clips of huge festivals honoring Mr. Kim, the extraordinary degree of cult worship is not well known, nor that programs promoting the ideology of Kim are growing, according to refugees, diplomats, and others who have visited the Hermit Kingdom.

In fact, in a time of famine and poverty, government spending on Kim-family deification — now nearly 40 percent of the visible budget — is the only category in the North's budget to increase, according to a new white paper by the Korea Institute for International Economic Policy in Seoul. It is rising even as defense, welfare, and bureaucracy spending has decreased. The increase pays for ideology schools, some 30,000 Kim monuments, gymnastic festivals, films and books, billboards and murals, 40,000 "research institutes," historical sites, rock carvings, circus theaters, training programs, and other worship events.

In 1990, ideology was 19 percent of North Korea's budget; by 2004 it doubled to at least 38.5 percent of state spending, according to the white paper. This extra financing may come from recent budget offsets caused by the shutting down of older state funding categories, says Alexander Mansurov of the Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies in Honolulu.

It has long been axiomatic that the main danger to the Kim regime is internal unrest. That is, Koreans will discover the freedoms, glitter, and diversity of the modern outside

world, and stop believing the story of idolatry they are awash in. "It isn't quite realized [in the West] how much a threat the penetration of ideas means. They [Kim's regime] see it as a social problem that could bring down the state," says Brian Myers, a North Korean expert at Dongseo University in Busan, South Korea.

Since the poverty and famine of the late 1990s, everything from cds and videos, South Korean radio, and cellphone signals from China, new styles and products, and new commercial habits have seeped in, mostly across the Chinese border, in a way that might be called "soft globalization." Such flows feed a new underground system of private business, information, bribery, and trade that exists outside the strict party-state discipline and rules.

Yet rather than accept such penetration as an inexorable threat, Kim is putting up a serious fight to slow and counter it — by increasing his program of cult-worship.

Kim Worship 2.0

Like a computer software firm updating program versions, the North is steadily updating its ideology to make it relevant. This practice of mass control by in-your-face ideology has been laughed off in much of the world, including China. But North Korea is increasing its ideological cult worship. The scope of the current project outdoes even the cult of personality during Mao's Cultural Revolution, according to a 2005 doctoral dissertation by Lee Jong Heon at Chung-Ang University in Seoul. Mr. Lee visited North Korea several times for his research.

After the Oct. 9 nuclear test, for example, banners sprang up over North Korea stating "We are a country with a nuclear deterrent." Kim's test feeds a national pride that is part of the propaganda drilled into Koreans from birth: that Kim alone can fend off the US and Japanese enemies. A US diplomat in Asia says such pride may prohibit Kim from giving up his nuclear program in the current "six party talks" — and those talks stalled again in late December in Beijing.

"The cult of personality campaign is more extensive today than in 1985," says former South Korean foreign minister Han Sung Joo, who visited Pyongyang this past October, and in 1985. "Unlike the Stalin and Mao personality cults, there is a deification and a religious emotional element in the North. The twinned photos of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il are everywhere. Every speech says Kim Il Sung is still alive. I think if I stayed another two weeks, I might even see Kim Il Sung. The country worships someone who is deceased, as if he is alive."

Kim Jong Il has upgraded his deification strategies to strengthen the family cult system. Western reports often detail Korea's unique "juche ideology" — a theology of Kim worship, repeated hourly and daily, reminding Koreans they are insolubly bound to the

Kim family and must erase foreign influence from their minds.

Yet juche is a subcategory of a far more encompassing umbrella of deification known as woo sang hwa, or idol worship. In North Korea, woo sang hwa contains all the aspects of cult worship. Kim broke away from orthodox communism, for example, in a program called "our style socialism." While Marxism-Leninism demands fealty to "nation," "party," and "serving the people" — Kim's "our style [Korean] socialism" does no such thing. It makes "family loyalty," with Kim at the head, the supreme good — a major deflection from communism.

During the late 1990s famine, a "Red Banner" campaign for unconditional loyalty and harder toil began. Then came "Kang-song Taeguk" in the late 1990s — a project to push economic and military ideology. This project culminated in the 1998 Taepodong-1 rocket launches, which thrilled North Koreans, frightened Japan, and started a whole new military mindset in Tokyo.

The North uses "ideology rather than physical control," Lee says, whenever possible. The current variation of the program is called "military first." It is intended to bolster North Korea's nuclear efforts. Military First started as a campaign to support juche, and as a slogan designed to remind Koreans that the nation is at war. It came packaged with a rallying cry called "dare to die," say refugees and Kim experts. (There's a dare-to-die pop song, and a dare-to-die movie. Recent internal memos brought by defectors indicate "dare to die" is urged on local officials due to a feeling in Pyongyang that young people aren't showing enough zeal to make such a dare.)

A new military focus

Yet Military First may now be a tool for evolving a significant structural change — a new ruling elite in day-to-day affairs. For years, the North Korean state was ruled by the workers' party. Under Kim Il Sung the party was the driving force in Korea, the main route to achievement and pay. Everyone wanted to join. (Party members in China and Vietnam are 5 percent of the population; a 1998 Korean Central report put Korea's membership at 5 million, or 22 percent, though it may be lower.)

"The outcome of the Military First policy replaces the workers as a main force," says Haiksoon Paik, a North Korean specialist at the Sejong Institute outside Seoul. "North Korea's party has not been functioning as well as it is supposed to ... several positions in the Politburo have not been reappointed. Kim is not depending on the party, but a smaller more streamlined military apparatus. This is due to his politics as a result of the nuclear crisis brought by the Americans."

"Military First is not aimed at building up the military, which is already quite built up and strong," says Lee, whose dissertation is titled, "A Political Economic Analysis of



the North Korean Regime." "It is about replacing the old party — First Rice — structure of senior Kim. If the party is unwieldy, the military will control the people on behalf of the leader."

Tellingly, on New Year's Day, Kim Jong Il visited the shrine where his father was interred. He has gone there only four times since he came to power in 1995. Each visit has taken place in a year following major accomplishments. According to South Korean media, for the first time, Kim visited the shrine without party or government officials. This time, only key military officials were in attendance. On Tuesday, North Korean papers heralded the visit, and the Oct. 9 nuclear tests as "an auspicious event in the national history."

Kim-worship in the North is a vivid — and inescapable — spectacle to behold, say visitors. Thousands of giant "towers of eternity" to Kim scatter the landscape. Special "Kimjongilia" crimson begonias are tended in family gardens. Kim's media calls him variously the "Guardian Deity of the Planet," and "Lodestar of the 21st Century." In 2002, Korean mass dances known as Ariang, featured 100,000 flag wavers (and was described in state media as the "greatest event of humankind.") Many loyal Koreans bow twice daily to Kim pictures that sit alone on the most prominent wall of their homes.

Perhaps the most misunderstood aspect of the Korean cult project is its recent veering toward race and ethnic solidarity, say Kim watchers. His main appeal to his people today, a push that rarely gets attention outside the North, is to the racial superiority of a people whose isolation and stubborn xenophobia supposedly makes their bloodlines purer. Mr. Myers notes that festivals of 100,000 flag wavers is not a Stalinist exercise, but a celebration of "ethnic homogeneity." Since the 1990s Kim has more fervently claimed lineage to the first ancient rulers of Korea, a move intended to place him in a position of historical, if not divine, destiny as leader of the peninsula.

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News/New Year

Venezuela's Chávez tightens grip on power

Thomas Catan

CARACAS, VENEZUELA — As he began his third presidential term, Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez laid the groundwork for a sharp leftward shift and launched a clampdown on dissent, in what analysts see as a broad-based effort to strengthen his grip on power.

Emboldened by his resounding re-election victory on Dec. 3, Chávez announced plans in mid January to nationalize power and telecom companies as part of an accelerated move toward socialism. This came after he had begun to act on longstanding threats to close media outlets aligned with the opposition, refusing to renew the broadcast license of Venezuela's oldest commercial television station, RCTV.

In January, he purged his cabinet of ministers deemed insufficiently radical, bringing in a new group of loyalists that included his brother, Adan. He began to merge the more than 20 parties in his governing coalition into a single force under his control. And, under a controversial new law, he is set to take control of nongovernmental organizations that could oppose his government.

"I don't think there is a lot of ambiguity about what Chávez is doing," says Michael Shifter, an analyst at Interamerican Dialogue in Washington, DC. "He wants to hold on to power for as long as possible, and even though he just won a resounding re-election, he doesn't want to take any chances of dissent building."

Crackdown on dissent

The Venezuelan president's decision to close RCTV, which has been broadcasting since 1953, has been met with strong criticism from the Organization of American States (OAS), the Catholic Church, and from press freedom campaigners like Reporters Without Borders. José Miguel Insulza, OAS secretary general, said the move smacked of "censorship against freedom of speech and a warning to other media, encouraging them to limit their operations so as not to face the same fate."

But Chávez, who referred to Mr. Insulza as an "idiot," says he will defy any international criticism.

Chávez is also moving to take control of civic groups, some of which have been critical of his government. Under a proposed law now in Congress, NGOs will have to reregister with the government, even if they have been operating legally for years. Foreign

funding will have to pass through the government, and NGOs would have to open their files to anyone that requests it. Human rights campaigners say it would effectively end their work.

"If approved, it will [effectively] outlaw all nongovernmental organizations" working in Venezuela, says Liliana Ortega of the Venezuelan human rights group, Cofavic. "There will only be groups approved by the government."

Amnesty International has called on Chávez to revoke the bill, with a spokesperson saying it would "restrict the legitimate work of human rights defenders in Venezuela." But Chávez shows no signs of retreating.

Chávez is also gearing up to change the constitution to allow his indefinite re-election — and has vowed to remain in power until 2021.

Mr. Shifter believes Chávez's effort to change the constitution could meet with substantial opposition within his own coalition. That could be a reason why Chávez is moving to take control of both supporters and critical NGOs.

"He would be in better shape to assure his power if there are no independent, critical civic organizations that could offer a channel for dissent and challenge to the regime," says Shifter.

Chávez's defenders deny his latest moves constitute an autocratic power-play. They say the measures are needed to defend the achievements of the "Bolivarian Revolution" from its enemies, such as those who launched a failed coup against Chávez in 2002.

The bill to regulate NGOs, for example, was introduced after Súmate, a voter education group involved in the 2004 recall drive against Chávez, was found to have received more than \$30,000 from the US-funded National Endowment for Democracy. They similarly accuse RCTV and other private broadcasters of having supported the failed 2002 coup and subsequent oil strike against the government.

"They became spokesmen for the opposition and allied themselves with the coup-plotters of 2002," says Martín Pacheco, media coordinator for the Chávez reelection campaign.

Growing blacklist

With political passions on the rise, Chávez's opponents say they

Some assembly required

It's the season when I like to flip through the family calendar and peruse my journals, looking back on the year gone by and daydreaming about what might lie ahead. There are ample happy memories from 2006. As a family we celebrated numerous milestones, including Grandma and Grandpa's 55th wedding anniversary; the birth of our first "great-nephew;" and our own 50th birthdays. Our twins turned 25, and the baby of the family turned 20.

I think of my mother-in-law on the evening of her 75th birthday. She took us all out for supper and I will always remember her sitting there at the table. She looked lovely in her navy blue pantsuit and yellow blouse, and practically beamed as she sat in the midst of her loved ones. Later on we presented her with a gift — an antique tea wagon. We could tell she liked it by her reaction: "It's beautiful," she said, "You guys are nuts."

Not all the memories are happy ones, of course. This was also the year that my mother passed away. But even that loss is tempered by the miracle that before she died she acknowledged Christ as her Savior. We will see her again in heaven.

There's never a dull moment in this family. Back in the spring our girls decided they wanted out of their basement apartment with its eye-level view of the parking lot before the summer weather arrived. They got a lead on an affordable house in the north end of Waterloo, and were told they had a good chance of actually getting it. So they gave notice on the apartment. Unfortunately, the man who owned the house was in a remote area of China, and his agent was unable to get final approval from him before month's end. Meanwhile, Stephanie and Jessica had to move their stuff out of the apartment with nowhere to put it. Suddenly our daughters were "of no fixed address." Thankfully a friend of theirs allowed them to jam their furniture into her garage and let them sleep in her guest room for a few nights.

A couple of days later the call finally came from China and they were able to move into a beautiful home in a nice neighborhood. This brought particular relief to Jack, who was sure he had smelled "something funny" in the hallway of their former building more than once and was convinced that the entire neighborhood was involved in questionable, if not illegal, activities.

Meanwhile, the ongoing project for the year was getting James and Willene established on a farm of their own. We started looking at the place back in February. To say it was a bit of a fixer-upper would be a monumental understatement. We lectured them sternly about how this enterprise would take all of their off-farm income for the next five years at least, not to mention every minute of their spare time and then some. They were undaunted. And so began the

are bracing themselves for a renewed crackdown. Some of the 3.5 million Venezuelans on a political blacklist compiled by his government two years ago say they have noticed a recent upswing in harassment by government officials.

Rocío San Miguel, a lawyer in Caracas, appeared on the blacklist in early 2004 after signing a petition to recall the president. She was fired from her job at Venezuela's

Intangible Things

Heidi VanderSlikke

endless stream of phone calls, credit applications, cash flow projections, and appointments with lawyers, accountants, and financial institutions.

Willene started painting everything that didn't move and, with the help of her parents, gutted two upstairs bedrooms to make them into one nice room. By the time they moved in at the beginning of September, the house was clean and cozy, and Willene had fallen in love with the collection of barn cats she inherited from the previous tenants. But the fun in the barn had just begun. For the next four months endless hours and a whole lot of money were poured into bringing things up to snuff for the arrival of their first chicks in mid-December. Jack spent long days running between our farm and theirs.

You can imagine, then, his delight when I ordered bedroom furniture for what used to be Stephanie's room, and it arrived in five flat boxes. Who knew it had to be put together? Nowhere on the catalogue pages had I seen those three little words that strike fear into the heart of mortal man: *some assembly required*.

Now Jack is one of the handiest guys I know and I truly admire his ingenuity and mechanical skill. But furniture building is way out of his comfort zone. I was amazed when he told me not to send it back, that he would putter away at it piece by piece in the evenings. "Look," he pointed out, "It says 'Easy to Assemble' in three different languages on every box."

Many nights while I was on the computer I heard the sound of the hammer and electric drill from upstairs. One drawer at a time he managed to put it all together. And after a couple of weeks, just in time for Christmas, the bedroom set looked exactly like the picture in the catalogue.

So looking back on the year gone by, I see a pattern of perseverance and payoff. Naturally, I can't predict the future, but there are certain things I know will be true of the year ahead: there will be celebrations and disappointments. There will be times when it's easy to praise God for all his blessings and other times when prayers are soaked with tears and punctuated by frustration. There will be unexpected joy in life's little things as well as great expectations that fall flat as a wheat field after a thunderstorm.

Through it all, God will be right there with his people, expecting them to persevere in faith. He has in mind for us only good, and therefore, I can safely foretell a "Happy New Year." But beware — there is "some assembly required."

Heidi VanderSlikke lives in Harriston, Ont. Her email: hmvanderslikke@hotmail.com



Chávez has won?"

Opponents say the list is used to screen applicants for jobs, social benefits, identity cards, scholarships, and credit from state banks.

One woman, who requested anonymity for fear of reprisals, says she was fired from her government job just before the Dec. 3 election, along with several others.

"That list is used all the time," she says. "People are very scared."

Church growth

How far is it to LandsEnd CRC?

David Snapper

Greetcha's phone rang for the third time on Thursday morning, an unusual occurrence. It was her younger sister Mary insisting that Greetcha accompany her and Pastor Bob on a day trip, for the sake of propriety, to LandsEnd CRC.

Losing Mary to the suburbs was bad enough. But the suburban congregation was growing fast and Pastor Bob's reputation as a skilled preacher and church leader had grown as fast. Greetcha snarled at the idea of spending two hours in the car with Pastor Bob as she smacked the cork into the old Thermos. Even the raisins in Greetcha's famous raisin bread seemed to shrivel under the force of her butter knife.

After the perfunctory, "Mrn'n, Rvrnt," a local greeting involving no vowels, Greetcha settled in for what would be a long (75 miles is 120K, Greetcha calculated) and miserable ride to LandsEnd.

Pastor Bob beamed optimism, as usual, and Mary bubbled with ideas for the liturgical dance, as usual. Greetcha studied the centerline of the highway until Bob – "just plain Bob" – spoke to Greetcha: "Have you been to LandsEnd?"

"No, not for long dime." (This was true.)

"Thank you for joining us today."

"Ja, I vasn't doing much today ennyway." (This was a direct lie.)

"Well, this will be exciting...."

And Pastor Bob – "Just Bob" – began to explain that LandsEnd CRC was now experiencing significant problems and that he, Pastor Bob, had been chosen by Classis Center City to research ministry options at LandsEnd.

The problems included the "Three M's of Ministry" – Money, Music, Missions. LandsEnd had been a new church plant just ten years ago. Begun with the customary excitement and support of Classes Center City, LandsEnd was intended to establish a CRC Reformed beachhead in the heavily Anglican community of LandsEnd.

The first two pastors had followed The Willow Creek Model of being seeker sensitive.

But seeker sensitivity is not helpful when the neighbors are not seekers. The third pastor was more in the tradition of Rick Warren. He had lasted the longest – nearly five years.

"Rick Warren?" Greetcha inquired.

"Yeah, you know," Mary enthused, "Rick Warren who was on *Larry King Live*."

Greetcha didn't know and could not have cared any less.

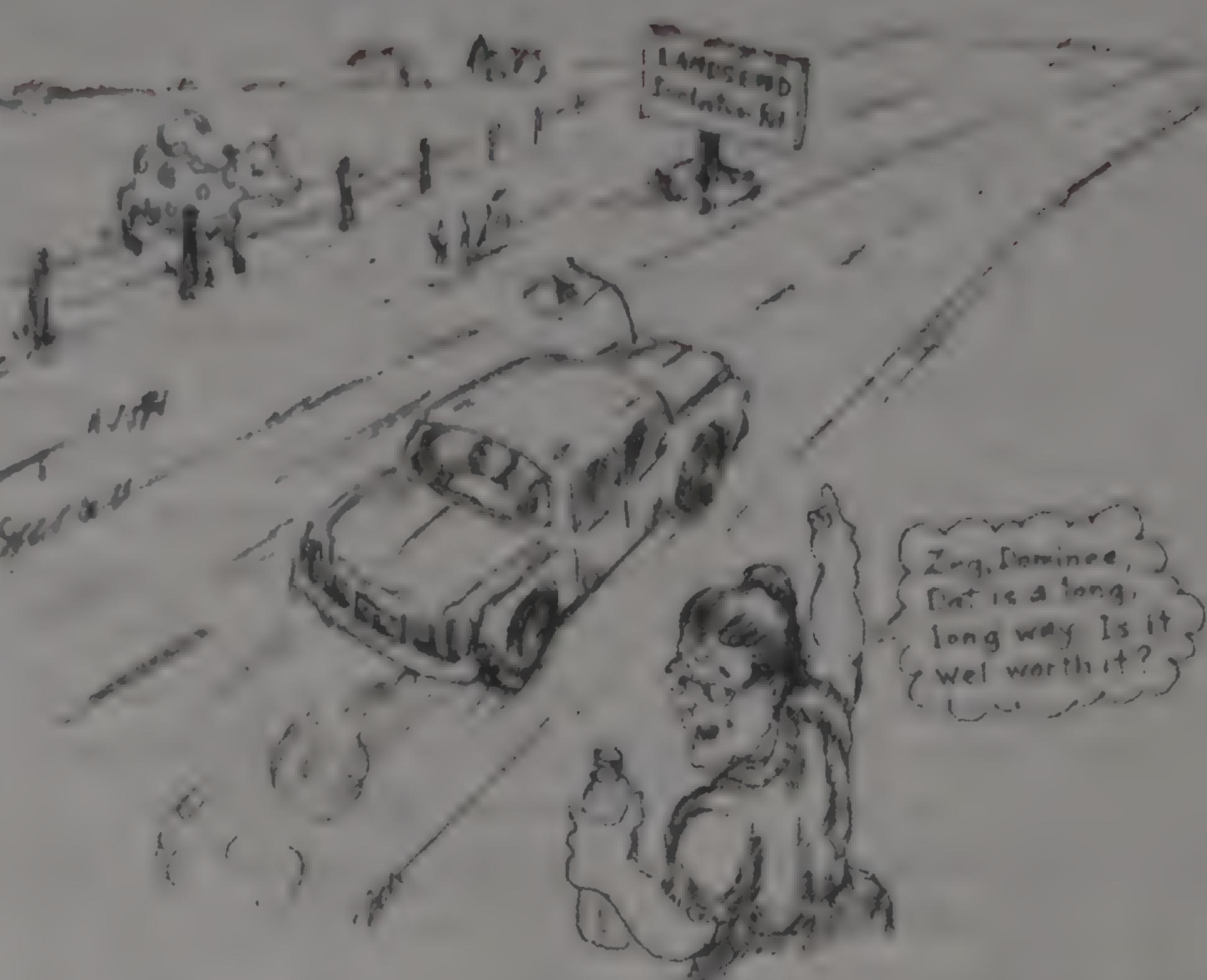
Well, after the first flurry of the start-up, LandsEnd CRC did not grow during the entire decade. After ten years the total membership was about 60 people, many of them half-hearted and irregular in attendance. Income for the congregation was about two-thirds of the money needed to operate.

In this crisis, Classis had indeed asked Pastor Bob, the Church Growth authority, to survey the situation and to advise Classis concerning future funding for LandsEnd. Pastor Bob was just the man – young and creative – and besides Center City CRC was the closest church to LandsEnd. That made Pastor Bob the right choice.

The story of LandsEnd

When they finally rolled into the parking lot of LandEnd, they were greeted by Elder Sean DeVries. After welcomes and coffee the work began in earnest.

DeVries explained that LandsEnd was now without a pastor. No one knew if the church should continue or fold. The faithful members of LandsEnd had done everything



possible to be warm and welcoming to the community, but growth never happened.

Sure, the first three years of ministry had been great. Then a major quarrel arose over worship preferences, and many of the founding members left, leaving behind many hurt feelings. Most returned to community churches, leaving the church confused and hurt.

The pastor sagged under the disappointment and was soon replaced by the second pastor. And then the third pastor had come and gone. Once the founding nucleus drifted away, morale had fallen. There was no way to recover the original vision.

Elder DeVries was broken-hearted. He had hoped to raise his children in a strong, faithful, Reformed CRC Church. In fact, he took employment at the CC (Copier Company) only because there was a CRC in town. But now he was the only real CRC member left at LandsEnd. He was tithing all he could, and a lot more besides. DeVries was Elder, part-time Deacon, Sunday School teacher, janitor, secretary, Vice President of Council and more. Fatigue and despair were almost overwhelming.

What would they do?

For the first time in a long time Pastor Bob sat motionless, unable to formulate a good reply.

When Just Bob asked Elder DeVries how many people were in the Praise Band, DeVries's shame and frustration were palpable. Even Just Bob felt the sharp point of his insensitivity. DeVries had done his best, given his heart and soul and love to the ministry and now had very little to show for his efforts.

Pastor Bob's members had just "poured" out of Center City into his suburban congregation as if an irrigation valve had been opened. Why not in LandsEnd? Even Mary was no longer bubbly as she absorbed the story DeVries had just explained.

In the long and painful silence, Greetcha's eyes welled with tears of sympathy for this earnest young elder and his family. She also knew the problem of abandonment firsthand. She too felt the deep wounds in her soul, wounds caused by the same pastor who drove her and by the sister who was munching her raisin bread. And soon her tears of sympathy became tears of hurt and anger for reasons she did not quite understand.

What would you tell Elder DeVries?

If you were Pastor Bob reporting at Classis Center City next week, how would you advise the twenty-three pastors and elders of the large and stable congregations?

Would you support LandsEnd with more money? Or close it and throw no more good money after bad?

What would happen to Elder DeVries and his children if LandsEnd closed?

What would happen to DeVries if they continued?

LandsEnd and the denomination

LandsEnd CRC is one of many isolated congregations in the CRC. Their situation, their problems and their future are the subject of this article. Before we finish this article I hope that you will come to love and honor Elder DeVries and the LandsEnd church. I hope you will see how much they need you there, and how little of the right support comes to them each year.

Finally, I hope that everyone who is a church planter or planner will see that LandsEnd's story is common. When I say "common," what I mean is "painfully common", because for every LandsEnd CRC there are many people who have invested in an untenable environment.

In our exploration, we will cover the following:

- What is an Isolated Congregation?
- What do we know about Isolated Congregations?
- Why is the Isolated Congregation important to you?
- How large and how serious is the problem of the Isolated Congregation?
- How can you minister to an Isolated Congregation?

What is an Isolated Congregation?

Any CRC that is not within the geographic boundary of a CRC Cluster is an Isolated Congregation. A Cluster is defined as three or more CRCs a) within 20-miles of one another and b) with a population of 1000 persons. Isolated congregations are more than 20 miles distance from a cluster of 1000 or more persons.

Characteristics of the Isolated Congregation:

- Geographic Isolation – An isolated congregation is more than twenty miles drive from a cluster of 1000 CRC people in three or more congregations.
- A CSI school is rarely, if ever, attached to an Isolated Congregation.
- An isolated congregation is normally a smaller congregation. Many (most) isolated congregations never reach 200 members.¹
- Due to small size, most Isolated Congregations have limited resources, reduced programs, and modest outreach potential.

The primary definition of isolated congregations is geographic. However, some subtle nuances exist some of which I call to your attention for the sake of being complete.

Migration Isolation

Sometimes a specific historical event brings a group of CRC people to an isolated (geographic) location. When the factor that brought the CRC people to that location is removed, the congregation is doubly isolated – first, geographically isolated and then, secondly, cut off from its source.

A typical example would be farmers moving from Chino, California to Boise, Idaho. That migration established a large, isolated congregation in a very short time. When the flow of farmers stopped, the church was cut off from its connection to Chino.

Ethnic Isolation²

An ethnic CRC congregation serving the needs of a minority population may be considered as an isolated congregation even when surrounded by other CRCs. You may find 100 CRC Hmong worshiping in your CRC, but if the nearest congregation of Hmong people is 200 miles distant, the group in your congregation will feel isolated even while inside your building.

Church growth

What do we know about Isolated Congregations?

We know a great deal about Isolated Congregations. I will share some of what have learned. Isolation begins with Location.

Location: Alone

Isolated congregations, such as LandsEnd CRC, are located in a variety of sites in the US and Canada. I estimate that we have more than 200 isolated congregations. In one way or another these 200 congregations are isolated from their peers.

Sometimes a classis has just one or two totally isolated congregations.

Sometimes a classis is comprised of several isolated congregations.

Amazingly, there are six classes in which every (or almost every) congregation is an isolated congregation (See Chart One).

In the next section we will see how significant the isolation can be.

Size: Hens And Chicks

All of these classes and congregations are so totally isolated that in all six classes there is not one cluster as we defined it above. We do not have the space to consider all 200 isolated congregations. Instead, we will consider the six classes that comprise (almost) entirely isolated congregations for our background data. Chart One represents the amazing situation and the real environment of 103 of CRCNA's most isolated congregations. This batch of classes and congregations are so totally isolated that in all six classes there is not one cluster as defined earlier.

Chart One presents the six classes of CRCUA. In these six classes are 103 congregations and 12,000 members. The 103 congregations average only 113 members per congregation. These are small congregations.

In Classis Arizona, every, or almost every, congregation is isolated.

In Columbia every, or almost every, congregation is isolated.

In Classis Hackensack, every, or almost every, congregation is isolated.

In Classis Pacific Hanmi, every, or almost every, congregation is isolated.

In Classis Red Mesa, every, or almost every, congregation is isolated.

In Classis Southeast, US every, or almost every, congregation is isolated.

At no place in these six classes can you draw a circle that encloses three or more nearby congregations totaling 1000 or more members (of the same ethnic group) within a twenty-mile driving radius. These congregations are truly isolated.

Of these 103 congregations, the average size is 113 persons per congregation.

Not one of the 103 congregations is over 700 members.

In each classis there is *one* larger congregation, that I call the "anchor" or the Hen of the chicks.

The anchor congregation in each classis contains approximately one-fifth (20 percent) to one quarter (25 percent) of the *entire Classis membership*. (In Southeastern USA a single 650-member congregation represents 25 percent of the entire classis!)

There is nothing that compares to this phenomenon of disproportional size in the other areas of CRCNA.

In the North American environment, where "size" is the Holy Grail of ministry, this pattern of small and isolated congregations cries out for understanding, explanation and attention. About one-fifth of all CRCNA congregations are affected by this pattern and almost no pastor or congregation prefers to be at the smallest viable membership size.

Rather than a chosen situation, the inability to grow a large church in isolation from other congregations is the burden and the dominant challenge of the isolated congregation.

In this brief survey we covered only about one-half of the isolated congregations. Another 100 isolated congregations are sprinkled into the other classes of CRCNA.⁴ Their situations are virtually identical.

Remember the contrast:

In Grand Rapids it is possible to draw a simple circle that encompasses more than 70,000 souls and a slightly more than 160 congregations in eight classes.

If you visit Grand Rapids East you will have a challenge finding a CRC congregation with *less than* 400 members.

Among Isolated Congregations you will have a challenge finding a congregation with *more than* 200 members.

I want to stress this point: The 103 isolated congregations of Chart One and the additional 100-plus that are scattered around the country exist in an environment which makes their experiences fundamentally different from those of the huge clusters of western Michigan.

Here are some of those differences:

No symbiosis – "iron sharpens iron" when contact is made. Isolated pastors often have limited contact with colleagues.

Pulpit supply is more difficult and proportionately more expensive.

Community name recognition – as an isolated and small congregation, the denominational name is not always known, and the name reminds people of the legal corrections system.

Program sharing – denominational programs visit the Center Cities where more potential attendees live. It's not likely that a full-blown "Day of Caring" event will be held

in Tucson.

In a cluster of congregations such as that in Ontario, California, the children may attend a church near Grandmother's church. She may visit her grandchildren's church for Christmas programs and Gems or Cadets' Sunday. Not so if Grandmother lives in Arizona.

Access – access to the denominational colleges, administrative centers, seminary and similar ministries is restricted in the isolated congregations.

Players and spectators – as the CRCNA moves away from full classical representation to regional representation on its boards, the isolated congregations will have sharply reduced participation in the ministries of CRCNA. For them, sense of ownership and of "being a player" is reduced.

These are a few of the differences between an isolated congregation in Arizona and a congregation at the center of a large cluster of churches.

Why is the Isolated Congregation important to you?

Why should we care about isolated congregations?

Among the qualities we love in Jesus' ministry is the record of Jesus' unwavering love for the broken-down people of his day: The widow, the dead son, the dead twelve-year-old daughter of Jairus, and the woman who had been sick for twelve years. Jesus healed these hopeless cases.

We are told with some care that Jesus loved the Rich Young Ruler, though that man resisted Jesus' love and went away sad. Jesus invariably saw the pathos of all the "widows' two pennies."

I'm suggesting to you in this reference to Jesus that the isolated congregations are the widows and orphans of the Christian Reformed congregations. They are far from their natural support, drained of many resources, and unable to match the expectations.

By analogy I suggest that just as I want to say that Jesus loves me, a mere sinner, it is my role and privilege to love the least church as much or more than the most prominent congregation.

As you know, Reformed theology maintains that every pulpit is equal to every other pulpit; every pastor a brother to every other pastor. And the priesthood of all believers is the most egalitarian principle of all times, assuring us that the importance of any member is exactly the same as the importance of every pastor, every boy; every girl, woman or man.

Why are the tiny isolated congregations important? Because the God who counts hairs and sparrows also counts congregations.

I have only one caveat: the woman who put her two coins into the offering that day in the temple.... We don't know what happened to her the next day. Jesus loved her and honored her position, but we do not know that he cured her poverty. We must be careful that we love and respect the isolated congregations because they belong to Jesus. We cannot be assured that Jesus will cure the smallness of size of every one.

How large and how serious is the problem of Isolated Congregations?

This is a trick question, of course.

There is no "problem" with isolated congregations *per se*.

The problem is that we want them to be large and self-supporting like the congregations inside the clusters.

But, really, is it a "problem" that the congregations in Arizona are small? Does the Bible tell us that smallness equals spiritual immaturity? Smallness is a "problem" because we want congregations to be what they are not and likely will not become.

CLASSIS	Number of Congregations	Total Classis Members	Average Members per Congregation	Largest Single Congregation in Classis
ARIZONA	10	1190	119	205
COLUMBIA	17	2351	140	512
HACKENSACK	19	2753	145	578
PACIFIC HANMI	15	982	65	151
RED MESA	18	1823	100	275
SOUTHEAST US	24	2654	110	651
SUMS & AVERAGES	103	11753	113	Avg. Largest - 395

CHART ONE: CRCUSA Classes comprising exclusively Isolated Congregations⁴

Continued on page 16

Ecclesiastes

The remarkable possibility of wisdom

Words from a wise man's mouth are gracious,
but a fool is consumed by his own lips.

At the beginning his words are folly;
at the end they are wicked madness.

and the fool multiplies words.

No one knows what is coming—

who can tell him what will happen after him?

Ecclesiastes 10:12, 13, 14

A. A. van Ruler

Words from the wise are gracious words, and we do well to listen to them. They win us over to those who utter them. They completely enthrall us. There is something bewitching about wisdom and the words of the wise.

This is remarkable in many ways, and therefore worth noticing. The most remarkable thing is perhaps wisdom itself, that is, the fact that there is such a thing as wisdom. It suggests that somehow or other there is something reasonable about being and existence.

Those who are wise have discovered this reasonableness – with their hearts. They have not only discovered it but accommodated themselves to it in the way they live. In their words they now speak of this experience of life, and through this experience they now speak about the reasonableness of being and existence to us.

The most important function of the wise is perhaps to focus our attention on this reasonableness. This fact – that it is possible for the human heart to have wisdom because reality itself displays a certain measure of reasonableness – is after all of unprecedented importance. In biblical dogmatics we say that God not only created things out of his goodness but also by his wisdom. So wisdom is not just something that belongs to human beings, a part of their piety, but wisdom is also part of God.

This statement is enough to make our heads spin every time we say it. No matter how deep we delve into the ground of being, we will always find wisdom, among other things of course. And because there is wisdom in God, who is the ground of being, there is also wisdom or reasonableness in being. There is much else as well, to be sure: power, factuality, thingness, contingency, fate, and perhaps even absurdity and a great deal of darkness. But through it all runs the structure of wisdom.



Rembrandt - Old woman reading

Let me repeat, this is a dizzying statement. It is entirely a statement of faith. But centuries ago it captivated our pagan forebears, and this is why we have taken such a trusting and active stance in the world.

Even from the perspective of reason there is much to support the contention that being is reasonable. In support, we can point out that there are wise human beings. People can be wise.

They can also be fools, of course. In fact, there are many fools. How much of our lives isn't wasted in foolishness? From this we might infer that the world was called into existence by a stupid, absurd, mad and malevolent god.

But wisdom is possible in this world. And the heart is able to find peace. Some are even able to achieve a certain harmony with this finite existence. We can be awakened to insight and to see how things are. And we can speak of this insight. These are all facts of life. They are facts that by definition indicate that a certain degree of knowledge, insight and utterance of things is possible.

Moreover, a wise human being is not only noteworthy and important as an indication of the reasonableness of being and of the wisdom of God; he is also important in and of himself.

That a human being can be wise, or become wise, is remarkable. Not everyone has been stricken blind. There are also those among us who are wise.

Were they born that way? Or did they become wise by way of a rebirth? I think I speak from common experience when I say that for the human heart to get even a few driblets of wisdom, a permanent and arduous process of conversion and rebirth is necessary.

But the remarkable thing is that the existence of wise human beings shows that such a rebirth is possible. We have obviously not been irretrievably abandoned to the ravages of folly. We can become wise. We can awaken to insight, to knowledge, to the word.

There is another remarkable thing worth noting.

The first remarkable thing was that things display a certain degree of reasonableness and that therefore God is wise. The second was that human beings can be awakened from their thrall and even from the folly of sin – enough that they can even to some extent become aware of the reasonableness of things.

The third remarkable thing is that if such a person opens his mouth and says something, his words can be gracious. They attract others and win their praise. People are attracted to those who are wise. They listen to them. They are enthralled by their words.

This too is a remarkable thing – that in this world dominated by corruption and folly it can nevertheless be immediately evident to us that what is wise is wise and what is foolish is foolish. At first glance, one would hardly think so, for a huge portion of what is said and written lacks any sense. And a lot of this nonsense is applauded. Nevertheless, when a wise person at last speaks up and has the courage to say how things are, immediately the wisdom of what he says is recognized.

Not that everyone immediately agrees. Wisdom wins relatively little applause in this world. Jesus, who said that he is the truth, was crucified. Nor do people begin to act in accordance with wisdom and truth. These are quickly forgotten. It seems astonishingly difficult, if not impossible, to shape the world according to wisdom.

However, none of this detracts from the fact that wisdom can be discerned as such over against folly. Wisdom is like the light: it stands out in the darkness. No one can miss it.

This remarkable fact raises all sorts of questions. How is it possible that this world, in which everything is spoiled, can discern that wisdom is wise, yet allow itself to be led by folly?

This involves ambiguities and contradictions that are not easily resolved. Man is obviously a divided creature. He not only possesses reason, by which he discerns light, but both reason and will, which reaches for the darkness, are rooted in the same heart. The will is the seat and the source of evil. The Christian church has expressed this in its teachings concerning sin and original sin. This is an upbeat teaching, for it says that evil is not in being, not in God, but in the human will.

But this evil has deep roots. Whenever he speaks, man, who is foolish, begins in blindness and this leads inevitably to a destructive stupidity. Foolish speech, foolish man, folly itself is foolish from beginning to end.

This doesn't unfold gradually, horizontally, but it is a steep slope. It goes deeper and deeper. It begins with blindness but ends in destructive stupidity.

Folly traps us in its net. It multiplies itself. It grows ever larger and more destructive. The lips of the fool devour himself. That's a powerful image. We could also compare it to the ocean waves that swallow the drowning man. This is what folly is like: in folly he devours himself. Humanity and the world are destroyed by folly.

This is the final remarkable thing that we come upon in this connection. Although we willingly and self-destructively give ourselves over to folly, humanity and the world are still here. They should have been destroyed long ago. But here we are.

Is this thanks to the unshakeable wisdom of the few that are wise? Is it because created reality is so sturdy that it is impossible to shatter? Is it because the Holy Spirit does not permit the sinner to bring destruction to its consummation? Or is it because of the cross of Christ, because of his atoning sacrifice and his love which bears all and covers all?

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Disabilities

Struggling with disabilities, trusting God

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

When Irene and Scott Lammers, members of Waterloo Christian Reformed Church, received the news in 2001 that their second child, Brianne, was born with a chromosome abnormality, they were devastated. A year later their son, Steven, was born with the same abnormality. Filled with shock and grief, they wondered what God had in store for them. In various ways and at different times, God gave them hope and courage.

In a recent e-mail interview, they shared their story.

Describe Brianne and Steven's condition.

Brianne, 5, and Steven, 4, are missing pieces of the 18th chromosome, which means they are missing important genetic information. Brianne suffers from delayed crawling, sitting, and walking, a small heart murmur, short stature, low muscle tone, soft teeth, severe speech delay, and some cognitive delays. Steven suffers from a severe hearing impairment, malformation of the bottom of his feet, overly tight hand muscles, reflux disorder, asthma, a compromised immune system, severe speech delay, cognitive delays, and delays in crawling, sitting, walking, and toilet training.

When did you become aware that your children had this condition?

A couple of months after Brianne was born, we became aware of her condition.

When she was born, she was hypotonic (very low muscle tone) and wasn't breathing. The doctor called in a pediatrician who was able to get her breathing. He noticed some dysmorphic features on her and drew some blood for a chromosome test. A month later, the Chromosome 18 diagnosis was made.

I became pregnant with Steven during that summer. We decided to have an amniocentesis. The geneticist informed us that I was carrying a boy with a chromosome 18 disorder. He noted that Steven's chromosome deletion was more serious and that he would have greater difficulties than Brianne had.

How did their health problems change your lives?

Brianne and Steven, in essence, were infants for two years instead of the usual one. One may argue that Steven was an infant for three years. Their dependence on us – the sleep disruptions and all that infants require – took longer than with most kids, taking its toll on our energy level.

Also, we had many doctor and therapy appointments. When we filled in the medical deductions section of our tax form after Steven's first year, we discovered that, on average, we took Steven and/or Brianne to doctor appointments outside of Waterloo once a week. Also, we had numerous local appointments which we stopped keeping track of.

Steven has had six operations (two on his feet, two for his Bone Anchored Hearing Aid (BAHA), and two to correct his hypospadias).

In addition, he has had frequent hospital admissions due to pneumonia, bronchiolitis, and dehydration. More recently, though, the kids have fewer appointments because they are getting older and doing better.

Another way their condition has had an impact on us is that I (Irene) have had to delay my career plans. I did try once to return to work as Psychometrist at a private clinic, but I couldn't find adequate child care. Also, the appointments and Steven's frequent hospitalizations made working outside of our home difficult.

Our children's needs – medicine, special clothing, and extended time in diapers – have also affected our financial situation. However, most of these expenses are offset by government assistance: Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities, Assistive Devices Program, Special Services at Home, and tax credits.

Do you know other parents whose children are similarly affected? Do you belong to a support group?

At first we had difficulty finding relevant information about Chromosome 18, but then we discovered the Chromosome 18 Registry and Research Society website (www.chromosome18.org). When we contacted the society, they immediately put us in touch with a family from Cambridge, Ontario who had a daughter with similar chromosome 18 problems as Brianne. This family gave us hope for Brianne's future.

After Steven's birth, the society's annual conference happened to be held in Niagara Falls, Ontario. (Keep in mind that we don't believe in coincidences!) We attended the conference and met many families from around the globe who had children with one of the many chromosome 18 syndromes. We met a couple of young adults with chromosome disorders similar to Steven's who were attending university. We now realize that it is unlikely that Steven will make it to university, but at the time we were encouraged.

We also joined a group from England identified as "Unique" (<http://www.rarechromo.org/html/home.asp>). Through this group, we met an Australian family who has a daughter with exactly the same chromosome karyotype as Brianne. We corresponded several times. They also encouraged us.

Next summer, we hope to go to a conference in Boston to visit with families, gain from their experiences, and encourage new families.

Do Brianne and Steven attend school? If so, how does the school provide for their needs?

Shortly after Brianne's diagnosis, we were referred for therapy to KidsAbility, a center in Waterloo which provides services for special needs children. Attached to this school is an Early Childhood Education class (ECE) and a Junior Kindergarten School. Brianne and Steven have both attended the ECE program. Last year, Brianne attended the Junior Kindergarten School. Steven attends that school this year. It's an amazing place! The teachers are committed to the students and they provide a great program geared to the children's needs.

Currently, Brianne attends the local Christian school with her older sister, 9-year-old Kaitlyn. Brianne shares a Personal Support Worker (PSW) with another special needs student. The school's principal acquired funding for the PSW through government sources and from the school. The PSW was assigned to Brianne to help with safety issues, to help her adapt to changes in routine, and to help her with toileting. The PSW also provides extra instruction and supports the work the teacher provides.

Brianne first learned to communicate using sign language. Although her speech is developing, and she relies less on signs, the teacher allows Brianne to use sign language to communicate her memory work. Soon after school began, her teacher and PSW noted with surprise that Brianne understands a lot more than they thought she did. Brianne's speech difficulties can cause people to underestimate her intelligence.

We are concerned about Steven's education. Although he is in a Junior Kindergarten School, he is receiving a program that is below the Junior Kindergarten curriculum. By January 2007, we need to decide where he will go to school for the next year. Our desire and dream are to send him to the Christian school with his sisters. However, he would have extreme difficulty handling the regular class program. At this point, unless he makes incredible gains, he will need a special class. Consequently, we may have to send him to the public school since the Christian school doesn't have the resources he needs.

How has your church community supported you?

Our church community is like a family to us. Our pastor joined us at the geneticists when we went to discuss the results of Steven's amniocentesis. The geneticist discussed the idea of abortion and our pastor supported us when we declined their suggestions. At the same appointment, our pastor encouraged us to allow the congregation to help us. The night Steven was born, our pastor and pastoral elder visited us at the Children's Hospital in Hamilton and met Steven.

Throughout the years, meals were delivered, child care provided, and prayers spoken on our behalf. Friends have driven us to out-of-town appointments, helped us through appointments, and visited us while Steven was in the hospital. Our congregation

The Lammers family



greatly loves our children.

How have you experienced God's grace and love as you've cared for your children?

God has given us increasing peace with every challenge we have faced. Initially, each hospitalization caused great worry, depression, and fear. We have learned to lean on God, expect his comfort, and trust that he will always be with us no matter what happens. Now, when Steven is sick or needs surgery for something, I am able to take care of him and I experience a measure of peace that wasn't there before.

Trust has been a big issue for me over the years. I trusted that God would take care of my family, and he allowed my children to be born with huge challenges. However, through my children, I learned to trust God in a different way. I was particularly touched by a book written by a mother who had two children with a life-threatening disorder. She was shocked one day when she was called to the hospital, not because her affected child was sick, but because her healthy son had hurt himself. She realized that she was expecting that, though her baby was sick, everyone else in her life shouldn't have anything bad happen to them.

I realized that I was afraid to trust God with the rest of my family, basically waiting for something bad to happen to them. I struggled with the fact that I couldn't trust God to keep the bad things away. I have learned that I need to daily, sometimes moment-by-moment, turn my concerns over to God. This has become easier to do through time. I have a long way to go though.

Irene and Scott agreed to have their family featured in Christian Courier because they want God to receive the glory: "We want people who have similar experiences to see that God is a God of love and that He is present during every difficulty and every joy. They can count on his comfort and they can ask Him for peace about their children. For people who don't share our experiences, we want them to learn what it is like for families like us. This is what we have learned so far and this is what we want to pass on to others."

Christ's birth

Reflections on Christmas

Lou DeVries

Did you have a good Christmas?

Did you get home in the one-horse open sleigh?

Did your dream of a white Christmas come true?

Did you see a baby in a manger and hear talk about world peace and good will to men?

What about that turkey dinner and maybe a glass of wine?

Was that your "good Christmas"?

Or was your "good Christmas"

as it is expressed in Handel's oratorio "The Messiah"?

Handel's oratorio is in three parts and is introduced with the saying:

"Majora canamus" (Let us sing of great things). What are those "great things"?

The first great thing is expressed in the title of the first part:

"The prophesy and realization of God's plan to redeem mankind by the coming of the Messiah." The first section of this part deals with God's promises of a Messiah and is taken mostly from the prophecies of Isaiah.

An orchestral interlude follows (Sinfonia pastorale). Then comes the announcement of Jesus' birth to the shepherds (Luke 2). No Hallelujah chorus here. No reason for it either, nothing had been accomplished yet. It was only the beginning.

Jesus' accomplishments are the subject of the second part of the Messiah, which starts with the heading:

"The accomplishment of redemption by the sacrifice of Jesus, mankind's rejection of God's offer, and mankind's utter defeat when trying to oppose the power of the Almighty."

This part expresses what the life of Jesus



was all about, and therefore it can end with the chorus:

"Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. (Rev.19: 6)

"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever." (Rev.11: 15)

KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS (Rev.19: 16)

Hallelujah!

The third part is: "A hymn of Thanksgiving for the final overthrow of Death."

This final part ends by quoting parts of Revelations 5:12-13: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain and has redeemed us to God by his blood, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing. Blessing and honor, and glory and power, be unto him that sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, forever and ever. Amen

It is obvious that the emphasis in this oratorio is on Jesus' death and resurrection and not on his birth.

The question arises: How do the gospels deal with the birth of Jesus?

Matthew deals with it in eight verses (Matt.1:18-25).

In the gospel of Mark, the birth of Jesus

is not mentioned at all.

Luke uses seven verses; it ends with Jesus being placed in a manger, if the adoration by the angels and shepherds is added, there are twenty verses. (Luke 2: 1-20)

In the first chapter of the Gospel of John a statement is made about Jesus birth: the first line of verse 14 says: "The Word became flesh...."

And what about the early church, what did they say about it? The earliest sermon recorded is the one preached by Peter on Pentecost day. The essence of the sermon is that Jesus was accredited by God; and, with the help of wicked men, you (the listeners) put him to death by nailing him to a cross. But God

raised him from the dead (Acts 2: 22-24). And Peter concludes in verse 36: "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

Not a word about Jesus' birth, but only about his death and resurrection.

In chapter 3 of Acts Peter speaks to the crowd, after they were filled with wonder and amazement because a paralytic had been healed, and Peter tells them: "You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead" (Verse 15). Peter and John are subsequently arrested and put in jail overnight, the next morning, facing the rulers and elders of the people, Peter answers the charge by saying: "It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you completely healed (Acts 4:10)."

Neither to the crowd nor to the rulers and elders is the birth of Jesus mentioned.

Stephen's speech to the Sanhedrin is a marvel of eloquence (it is worth rereading, Acts 7). He concludes by saying: "They (the stiff-necked people from the past) even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him...."

When Peter presented the gospel to Cornelius, he said: "They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen (Acts 10:34-43)."

It is obvious that, in Scripture, the emphasis is on the death and resurrection of the Lord. This emphasis is also expressed in the creeds we confess to be the essence of our Christian faith. The statement in the Apostles Creed is: "I believe in...and in Jesus Christ...who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary...." The creed goes on with Jesus suffering, death, resurrection, ascension and return.

The Nicene Creed does say the same in slightly different words: "We believe in God the Father Almighty...and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God...and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man...." Then it goes on along the same line as the Apostles Creed.

The longest one, and as far as I know the one that is used the least, is the Athanasian Creed. The one sentence in this document referring to Jesus' birth is: "...it is necessary to everlasting salvation that he believe rightly the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ." Although the greater part of this document deals with "That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity," it nevertheless closes with the statement:

"He suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead; he ascended into heaven, sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty: from whence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead."

We, that includes us as Christians, make Christmas the most celebrated event of the year. I am sure you did not celebrate it with the one-horse open sleigh and a dream of it being white, but was it really biblical? So, what happened? Did we get distracted in our Christmas celebration or maybe even deceived?

We have nearly a year now to think about changes and above all if the way we celebrate Christmas is the way we want to present our Lord to "The World."

LandsEnd CRC ...continued from p. 13

Sometimes we want our new church plants to be the next generation of Saddleback Church or Willow Creek. We want to be the next champion.

When we impose the current mega-church model onto our own isolated churches, we are forever restless with our churches as they are. We sometimes want to live someone else's dream.

The "we" in the above paragraph is the many of us who are striving to do better, be better, perform better and accomplish more. We do want to achieve more. Hopefully and prayerfully, we want to achieve more in accordance with God's plan. But the need for "more" is a part of the human

need to achieve. I am guilty of wanting to be more.

How large is the problem? It's not a problem – unless your heart aches to be and do more. Unless your heart aches for Elder DeVries and the three un-named pastors who failed at LandsEnd.

And if your heart so aches, the problem of smallness is size and remoteness from your local community can be a consuming problem.

How can you minister to the Isolated Congregation?

I'm sorry; this is yet another trick question.

If you are in a large cluster, you cannot easily minister to the Isolated Congregation because it is not an easy commute to the church or its members. Not many of us can commute to Prairie Lane, Omaha, Nebraska, for coffee in the afternoon. Or amble off to Anchorage for the day. Or to Nova Scotia (though I am willing to go!).

Remember Greetcha? She was not keen on spending the day trekking to and from LandsEnd CRC. Indeed, it takes a special person to help at LandsEnd.

On a personal note, I will tell you the one thing that has troubled me the most in my twenty-two years as pastor of an Isolated Congregation. Perhaps God will use this to

trigger a thought inside of you. I hope so.

I'd say that most pastors and congregations who live in isolation have the sense of being second best, as if they have somehow failed in their roles and responsibilities to God and the denomination.

And, in contrast, if anything has empowered and encouraged me it has been the knowledge that Second CRC of Linden, and San Diego CRC have supported the ministry here.

In the next article of this series I will describe a synthetic cluster that is forming in the Seattle region. This synthetic cluster will have a new definition. It will be defined as a cluster of intention and choice.

Family

LandsEnd CRC ... cont. from p. 16

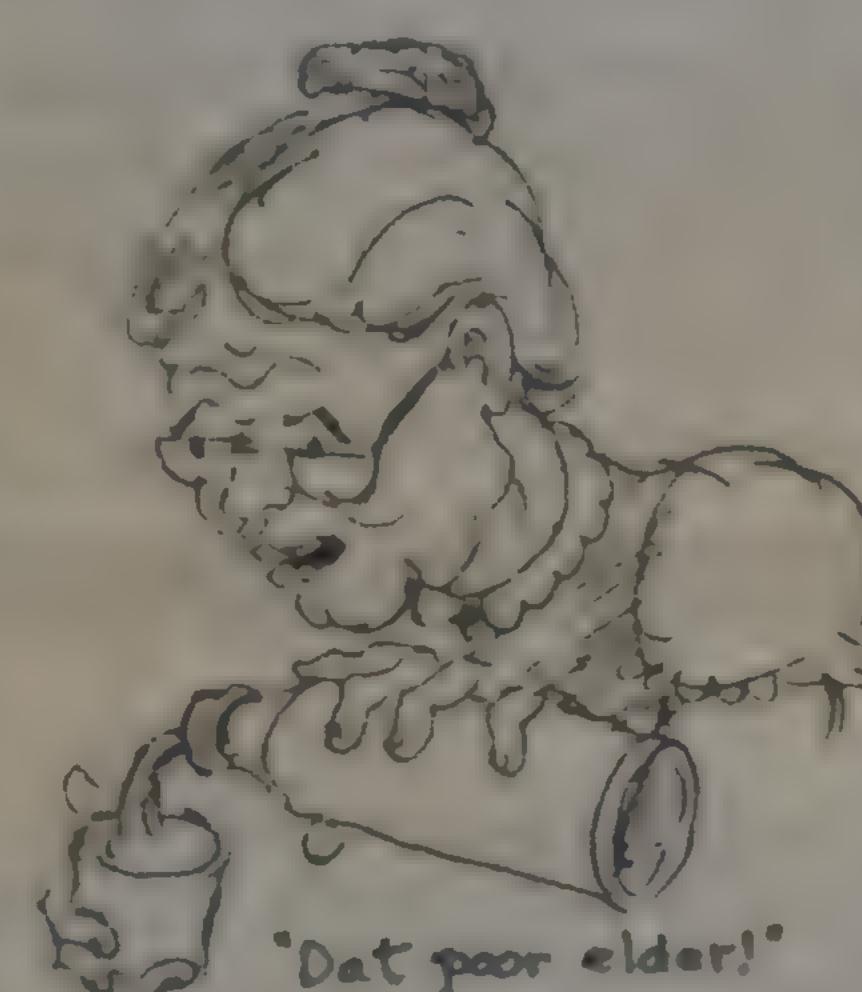
As we conclude this review, I want to return your attention to Greetcha, Mary and Just Bob as they somberly drive home. Snow has begun to drift gently onto the highway, hushing even the sounds of the tires. Greetcha stares forlornly at the centerline wishing her Thermos had just one more cup in it. Pastor Bob and Mary are silent.

For the first time Greetcha stretches her neck, turns and faces Pastor Bob, whose gaze is fixed out the window and into the night.

"Bob!" She says abruptly, startling even herself. "Bob, why do dey wait so long to send you? DeVries is out dere all alone. Why didn't Classis help sooner!"

"Well, Greetcha, it doesn't matter when I would go because we really don't know what to do to help LandsEnd CRC. That's why we usually ask a church like LandsEnd to close down. It's cheaper to close it. We could sell the property and reinvest it in a new ministry somewhere."

"My Fader was a farmer - he'd go out in de middle of a storm to get a lost calf in the middle of the night. Why not Elder DeVries?"



Footnotes

¹ Some readers will recall that an earlier article listed the congregations surrounding Orange City as mostly in the 250-member range. That size is typical of churches IN a cluster, but not a Center City. The truly isolated congregations being considered here are about half the size of those surrounding a Center City as defined in the earlier article.

² For purposes of this article we will not consider the complexities of ethnic minorities, gender issues, and/or social and economic classes.

³ I am entirely ready to admit that I may have missed a cluster of 1000 CRC people within a 20-mile radius. If a reader has more accurate map skills or software than I have, please do let me know. For example, Hackensack may have a cluster.

⁴ Some additional isolated congregations: Fort McMurray, AB; Vergennes, VT; Kamloops, BC; Spokane, WA; Sioux City, IA; Omaha, NE; Lincoln, NE and so on.

The articles by David Snapper are available on our website: www.christiancourier.ca

A three layered club sandwich?

I learn by going where I have to go.

Theodore Roethke

Each day, life is a series of choices, and as we use the lens of writing to view our lives, we see our choices.

Julia Cameron

For the last twenty years I have seen myself as a traditional grilled cheese sandwich. Now I am finding out I have been a grilled cheese and ham sandwich since I became a grandparent about ten years ago. A traditional sandwich is a two-layered affair while a club is a three-layered concoction. So says Carol Abaya, who not only coined the term, but is also a nationally syndicated newspaper columnist on "The Sandwich Generation." Carol sees this group of women and men to be the early boomers who are in their 50s and 60s and looking after the needs of aging parents while also being sensitive to the needs of their adult children as well as their grandchildren. And if the truth were told, I fit the bill. I suppose I could be the ham and cheese, greasily grilled and tidily tucked, between three slices of - possibly - twelve-grain bread?

Of course, not every boomer has this challenge. Some of us do not live close to aging parents, adult children or grandchildren. For me, however, I am fortunate to have the opportunity to spend quality time with those dearest and nearest to me especially after I decided to give up my work a few years ago. And when I think of my fortune, a specific day last summer comes to mind.

On this day my visit with my aging mother is the way it usually is - soothingly quiet. We have a relaxing morning coffee, take a walk in a local park and share a simple lunch, all the while chatting about 'what might have been,' 'what actually is' as well as 'the blessings of our daily lives.' When my mother has her afternoon nap, I stretch out on her sofa. Just as I am nodding off, my beeping watch reminds me of my afternoon shift with my two-year grandson so that my second daughter can go to work. I tug on my runners and jog a block down the road.

After giving me some last minute instructions about the sleeping child, my daughter leaves and I retire again to the sofa with the hope of continuing my afternoon siesta. No sooner do I close my eyes, when I hear a thud and feel someone nudging me and asking, "I play soccer with oma?" Putting on my energetic face I jog outside with my grandson in tow and we kick the ball with the gleeful abandonment of a two-year-old! After an hour and half he asks to go to the playground up the road for our 'climb and catch' game. This means he climbs and I catch, allowing him to defy gravity without what would be some nasty natural consequences. All the while my heart is pounding and drops of sweat slides down the small of my back. I finally breathe a sign of relief when I see his father making his way towards us. I kiss my grandson goodbye and jog a block back to my vehicle, which is still parked at my mother's retirement complex, jump in and drive off, ready to tackle dinner at home.

As I am traveling along I decide to drop by the local police station to see how my youngest daughter is doing. She looks pale and tired and she tells me she feels nauseous. I remind her that is normal considering she is newly pregnant. She tells me she has to work overtime today. I offer to swing by her house and take her two dogs for a walk because I know her husband is also doing a twelve-hour shift today. She asks whether I really want to do this. I tell her it is not a problem.

I drive to her house and clip the leash onto the two dogs and trudge to the riverbank close to her home. I look forward to a nice walk as the late afternoon sun casts its golden rays over the rippling water.

I forget, however, the dogs are offspring of racing huskies and are of a different mind. They want to run and race. I want to walk and wander. There are two of them and only one of me. Their

Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove



tails twist impatiently as they trot at a steady pace. I try to keep a comfortable tension on the leash but they tug and tug as they run faster and faster. Eventually, I give up and soon we are flying along the riverbank.

Again my heart is pounding and the sweat slides down my back. My brain feels scrambled and I wonder if I should yell, "stop" or "mush." I have time for neither, as my foot gets caught under an exposed root and I catapult down the riverbank. My yelling and flailing about tightens the leash and probably frightens the dogs as they abruptly stop to look back at the human form eating dust and dirt on the ground.

They look at each other and remain motionless. I think they take pity on me. I thank them under my breath and limp back to my daughter's house. Eventually, I painfully crawl into my vehicle and drive home.

I check the telephone messages on my answering machine and hear a cheerful friend wondering where I am - suggesting I might be leisurely basking in the sun today since I am so lucky to be so serenely retired? I groan and chuckle at the same time.

Such can be a day in the life of an early boomer, depending upon the choices we make. For most of us these normal life's stages catches us unaware until something happens, such as a parent suffering a serious stroke or an adult child experiencing difficulty managing everything on his or her plate. Whichever level of generation we belong to, be it traditional or club, we will be faced with choices that will impact our lives for good or for ill depending upon what is important to us.

Presently, there are many studies being done on how the boomers are managing this inter-generational stage. Most of them focus on how extended elder care is impacting their lives. For instance, a recent Canadian study showed caring for an elderly parent, relative or friend has become a way of life for many Canadians.

In 2002 more than 1.7 million adults aged 45 to 64 provided informal care to almost 2.3 million seniors with long-term disabilities or physical limitations. Seven in 10 of these caregivers - most of them women - were also in the workforce. The study showed these responsibilities eventually led boomers to reduce working hours or change work patterns as well as turn down job offers.

Furthermore, some people just decide to pack it in and retire and accept the reduction in income so they can provide better care to their elderly parents, relative or friend. These are always difficult decisions to make (more on this in another column). For myself, I do not regret the choice I made several years ago to cut short my career so I could have more time to be with those I love.

Arlene Van Hove, pictured above with her mother and grandson, is a therapist and a member of the Fleetwood CRC. She can be reached at avanhove@shaw.ca

Reflections

From the 11th Province

In my 54 years on this earth I have never been an optimist about the state of the world. I have never had a problem with original sin. I don't mean to say I'm untainted by sin! What I mean is, I've never had a problem believing that basic tenet of Calvinism. Even as a child I recall being acutely aware of the effects of sin both within and around us. That we are conceived and born in sin, that sin is the fundamental disease that effects us and all creation was (and still is) blatantly evident. As I got older I began to wonder why so many other people had (and have) a problem acknowledging the truth of that concept (as if the evidence isn't all around us!).

The news we hear every day seems ever more bleak; statement after statement, event after event demonstrates over and over the consequences of shunning the God who created us, mourns our waywardness and mercifully offers us a way out. I personally know people who point to progress in medicine, science, technology and many other areas as proof that the world is getting better. They are quite convinced that we'll further use our own ingenious bootstraps to pull ourselves out of the deep hole of disease, famine and strife into a better world. They can't quite explain, however, how those bootstraps will eradicate the greed, pride, corruption, selfishness, love of money, and other vices and God-repudiating thoughts and acts that lie perpetually at the bottom of that hole.

From the standpoint of physical comfort, it's certainly easier to be alive now than it was when our grandparents were young, and when our ancestors were alive. But we here and now have philosophical and spiritual burdens of a kind that our ancestors did not know. And I suspect that at least some of us alive will encounter serious persecution for our faith. The wicked will seem to triumph.

'What is truth?'

Every now and then I tell myself in disgust that I'm no longer going to keep track of the news across the globe; it makes me despair, and it often makes me angry too. A long hibernation in, say, the Yukon (though a tad cold) sometimes seems like it might be a viable alternative to life in our current world. The older I get the less tolerance I have for the increasing denial of God, for the worship of false gods, for the fashionable truism in the sophisticated West that the only truth in the world has no capital T, but is simply your truth and my truth (and it's rather too bad for you if yours conflicts with mine).

Righteous anger is a legitimate reaction, particularly to and about those who should know better, some of whom confess to know better: for example, to a church that says it's a church of Jesus Christ (the Episcopal Church) but can no longer muster the courage to speak of Christ as *the Truth*, having decided that it is so much more palatable to misquote Jesus as saying, "I am way, truth and life" (and then to leave out the following part of that declaration in which Christ asserts, "No one comes to the Father but by me"). "*The Way, the Truth, the Life*" is just too exclusive; it offends those who don't happen to think he is!

"Is Christ the only way to salvation?" the head of that American church was asked shortly after her investiture. Her short answer would have been No. But she doesn't love the truth enough to have said that. Instead she talked about not wanting "to put God in a box," i.e., not binding him to "one road." Never mind that God himself contradicts her, saying that those who deny Christ as LORD are antichrist (1 John 4). She doesn't believe it; after all, only fundamentalists and evangelicals think God literally speaks in the Bible, and consider what *they're* like.

I also grow weary of the practical atheism that acts as

'How long, O LORD, will the wicked triumph?'

if satisfying one's own desires and wants, pursuing the so-called "good life," is the chief end of man (and woman) – even while I fight the impulse in myself to be too attracted, too attached, to the good gifts in that good life (even gifts from God can become idols). Could any age but ours have a magazine called *Self* or a TV show called "I Want That"? If you don't see the nasty effects of a self-absorbed, God-denying spirit in your non-Christian neighbors or in your own community, be thankful; but you need only watch television and keep track of national and world events to see its pervasiveness.

No room for God

I was thinking of those things the other day when I read Psalm 10 and several other Psalms. The psalmists' ancient observations are uncannily apt: "In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak, who are caught in the schemes he devises. He boasts of the cravings of his heart; he blesses the greedy and reviles the LORD. In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God. His ways are always prosperous; he is haughty and your laws are far from him; he sneers at all his enemies. He says to himself, 'Nothing will shake me; I'll always be happy and never have trouble....'" (Ps. 10:2-6).

All of the psalmists often feel that the heavens are as brass: God simply doesn't heed. (Has any of us not had similar thoughts?) The psalmists wonder why God allows evil and unbelief to flourish – and, they admit, why God allows it to effect the righteous. I wonder that too, and I suspect you do. My best response is to implore God for mercy – on the unrighteous and on us – but I confess to becoming weary and overwhelmed by the immensity of the numbers of people, situations and ministries that need my (and your) prayers (and money and time).

"Arise, LORD!" pleads Psalm 10. "Lift up your hand, O God. Do not forget the helpless. Why does the wicked man revile God? Why does he say to himself, 'He won't call me to account?'" (vv.12-13). In a similar vein, the psalmist of Psalm 12 calls on God to "cut off all flattering lips and every boastful tongue that says, 'We will triumph with our tongues; we own our lips – who is our master?'" This psalmist feels, not unlike Elijah did, that as an obedient follower of God he is alone (or nearly so), that the righteous are sparse on the ground. "Help, LORD," he cries out, "for the godly are no more; the faithful have vanished from among men."

How long, O LORD?

Well, is God going to be silent forever? How long will he merely look on (Ps. 35:17)? How long will he allow his enemies to mock him (Ps. 74:10)? How long will he defend the unjust and show partiality to the wicked (Ps. 82:2)? How long will he allow the wicked be jubilant (Ps. 94:3)? The fact that the psalmists and we have a God to whom (or at whom) we can hurl such angry, frustrated questions without fear of his striking us down for impious audacity and impertinence should itself remind us that he is loving, merciful and just, and that he *will* redress wrongs against the righteous and punish the wicked. His Kingdom will come. But we must keep reminding ourselves that he will do it in his own time.

The LORD reigns

Though it may seem to us that our current times are worse than those of even a generation ago (and in certain ways that's undoubtedly true),

the fact that those discouraged cries of the psalmists strike a chord with us nearly two-and-a-half millennia later is a comfort. The psalmists give us an important lesson in how to respond when we are frustrated over the willful unbelief we see, and when we despair of a world that seems mostly lost. Side by side with the Psalms' raging against God's enemies is the remembrance that *the LORD reigns*. He *does* act to help the righteous. He *does* redress wrongs. He *does* change hearts and lives. He *does* save the lost. After the psalmist of Psalm 10 expresses amazed wonder that wicked men can actually revile God and think that God won't hold them to account, he tells God, "But you, O God, *do* see trouble and grief; you consider it to take it in hand" (v. 14a). Then he calls on God to "break the arm (i.e., the strength) of the wicked and evil man" – don't let him continue in his evil. And then we see how and why that's possible: "The LORD is King for ever and ever; the [pagan] nations will perish from his land." And we're assured: "You hear, O LORD, the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry, defending the fatherless and the oppressed, in order that man, who is of the earth, may terrify no more" (vv. 16-18).

The Messiah has now come, and we must *still* be patient. The writer to the Hebrews tells us, "In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him." But there's something, or rather, someone we do see. "But we see Jesus," Hebrews continues, "who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one."

Our prayers mean more than we're often aware. "The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective," says James (5:16). So despite any inclinations towards compassion-fatigue and world-weariness we should never tire of offering them, on behalf of our fellow Christians who need those prayers, and on behalf of the lost world – so that they might see Jesus, and not taste death.

Marian Van Til worked for Christian Courier from 1984-2000, and preceded Harry der Nederlanden as its editor. She now lives in Youngstown, NY; she may be contacted via e-mail at <mvantil@adelphia.net>.



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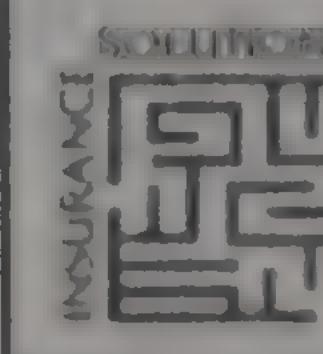
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Mrs Nell Norg lives at Parkview Meadows Townsend ON N0A 1S0	Grace (Grietje) Wilms (nee Vriend) on February 1, 2007	May God bless you in the year ahead.					RATE: (GST added to rates listed) All personal and family announcements \$6.00 per square inch. rose@christiancourier.ca	
OPEN HOUSE in celebration of 90th Birthday for Jan Hulst of 44 Hawthorne Crescent Aylmer ON N5H 3C3	From your family: Jim & Grace Wilms, Wasaga Beach, ON Nell & John deBoer, Toronto, ON Winnie & John VanderBorgh, Humble, TX Anna & Tymen VanHalteren, Lindsay, ON Bill & Lena Wilms, Lindsay, ON John Wilms, Lindsay, ON Richard & Cora Wilms, Lindsay, ON 33 Grandchildren, 50 Great-grandchildren	An Open House will be held at her home on Thurs., Feb. 1 from 2-4 p.m. at 364 Angelene Street North Lindsay ON K9V 4R1 Best Wishes only please					Display advertising re. businesses and organizations: \$8.00 per square inch. ads@christiancourier.ca	
Invitation is extended by his family to an Open House held on Feb. 3, 2007 at the Aylmer CRC From 9:30 a.m. to noon. Best wishes only.							PHOTOS: There is a processing fee of \$25 for the inclusion of a photograph with a personal or family announcement. Photo space is not charged per square inch but we reserve the right to determine published photo size. Please note that we cannot use a faxed photo. We need either an original photo (which we will return) or a downloadable internet image.	
Obituaries							PERSONAL ADS: <i>Christian Courier</i> would be pleased to handle your personal ad in an efficient and discreet manner. The cost to set up a personal file under a unique file number is \$25. Ads requesting correspondence with this file are run at \$8 P.I. per insertion. All correspondence is immediately forwarded unopened.	
1916 Delfgauw, Holland December 13, 2006 The Lord took unto himself our dear mother, grandmother and great-grandmother	MARINUS CORNELIS MOL Nieuwerkerk, Zeeland April 6, 1923 Passed on to Glory on Sunday, December 24, 2006, in his 84th year at the Trillium Health Centre, Mississauga, Ont.	2006 Brampton, Ontario December 24, 2006 Beloved husband of Rena and loving father of: Nellie (Bob) Lamb Susan Janssen Lorraine (Leonard) Van Harten Betty (Harry) Geerlinks Janet (Ted) Van Lingen Michael (Marja) Dear brother of Stan Mol, Sue Condotta, and Connie Luyt Proud and loving grandfather of: Michael, Jamie, David, Jeffrey, Anita, Jeannette, Brian, Kathryn, Charlotte, Kim, Karen, Steven, Brandon, Monique, Nathan and 13 great-grandchildren Funeral service held on December 28 at Brampton 2nd CRC. Interment Meadowvale Cemetery, Brampton. Psalm 118					NEWLYWEDS & NEW PARENTS: We offer a \$25 one-year subscription to couples whose wedding is announced in <i>Christian Courier</i> and to parents who announce a child's birth in our paper. If you want to take advantage of this offer, please let us know when placing your ad.	
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JACKIE FLINTERMAN (nee Kok) <i>I lift up my eyes to the hills – from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.</i> Psalm 121:1,2							OTHER INFORMATION: <i>Christian Courier</i> reserves the right to print classifieds using our usual format and editing style and is not responsible for any errors due to hand-written or phoned-in advertisements.	
Scherpenzeel, The Netherlands July 15, 1913 December 27, 2006 On December 27, 2006, our dearly loved mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother, Jackie Flinterman, was released from her suffering and taken home to heaven by her Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.	October 19, 1914 Sebaldeburen The Netherlands	December 30, 2006 Grimsby Ontario					Vacation	
She was predeceased by her beloved husband, Henk, in 1980. She leaves to mourn: Adolph & Jeanette Dykstra, Edmonton, AB Jeff & Evelyn Dykstra, Winnipeg, MB Elissa, Steven, Chris, Kevin James & Deborah Dykstra, Winnipeg, MB Abigail Jon Dykstra, Abbotsford, BC Henk & Henny Vroege, Edmonton, AB David & Carrie Vroege, Halifax, NS Lian, Neil (†2003) Russ & Rachel Vroege, Edmonton, AB Micah	Mootske (Mary) DRENTH (nee vanderHeide) On the morning of December 30, 2006 the Lord called home his child, Mootske (Mary) Drent, at the age of 92 years.	Beloved wife of: Jurnien (Jerry) Drent for 68 years. Dearly loved Mother of: Albert & Willy Drent Pete & Annemarie Drent Henry & Ruth Ann Drent (Tom †1989) Joanne Drent-VanDyke & Dick VanDyke Linda & John Rynberk Bert & Atherton Drent Theodore & Sandra Drent Loved Grandma to 18 grandchildren and 11 great-grandchildren. Also predeceased by one granddaughter and one great-granddaughter both in infancy, and by all her siblings in Holland.					Dear Reader, First of all, we would like to introduce ourselves. We are a reformed family of 6 persons, father, mother and four children (aged: 18, 16, 12, 10). It is our dream to visit Canada in the coming summer-holiday. We think about a period of 3 or 4 weeks in the months of July or August 2007. But at this moment we don't have a place to stay in your country. Please, can you help us?	
A Memorial Service was held at West End Christian Reformed Church in Edmonton on Saturday, December 30, 2006, with Pastors David Vroege and Bob De Moor officiating.	Funeral service was held Tuesday, January 2, 2007 in Wellandport, Ontario. Some years ago she had chosen her own text: Ecclesiastes 12:1-8. We thank God for her life's testimony.						Maybe we can exchange our houses. Or do you know somebody who may be interested? We live in Zwolle, The Netherlands, about 100 km from Amsterdam. We can offer you our house (5 bedrooms), car and bikes and so on. We would like to stay in the neighbourhood of Hamilton/Toronto, Ontario, since we have relatives in the area.	
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Application deadline: January 26, 2007.

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We welcome applications from those who are able to teach in one or more of these areas: historical theology, systematic theology, missions, preaching, pastoral care, and educational ministry.

For information, please visit www.calvinseminary.edu/facultysearch.php.

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Applicants and nominees must be wholeheartedly committed to the creeds, confessions, and polity of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.



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CITIZENS for PUBLIC JUSTICE

seeks a **COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR**
for its new Ottawa office

Deadline for applications: 4pm February 23, 2007

Start date: April 1, 2007

► This position has lead responsibility for both strategically shaping CPJ's public policy messaging and building CPJ's public profile and brand.

► CPJ is a national organization of citizens inspired by faith to act for justice in Canadian public policy. CPJ is stepping up to a new level of impact which includes moving to and focusing its policy work in Ottawa.

For application process and job description see www.cpj.ca



CITIZENS for PUBLIC JUSTICE

Public Justice Policy Analyst
Financial Development Coordinator

► CPJ is seeking expressions of interest before launching a formal application process for these two positions in its new Ottawa office.

► CPJ is a national organization of citizens inspired by faith to act for justice in Canadian public policy. CPJ is stepping up to a new level of impact which includes moving to and focusing its policy work in Ottawa.

For application process and job description see www.cpj.ca
Deadline: 4pm February 23, 2007


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August, 2007

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Teach introductory and upper division courses in economics.

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Visual Arts Faculty (Possible opening)

Teach graphic design; work with InDesign, Illustrator, Photoshop, and After Effects; other assignments such as internship supervision or photography.

To learn more about a position and receive application materials, qualified persons committed to a Reformed, biblical perspective and educational philosophy are encouraged to send a letter of interest and curriculum vita/resume to:

Dr. Rockne McCarthy Facsimile: 712 722-4496

Vice President for Academic Affairs E-mail: vpaa@dordt.edu

Dordt College Web site: www.dordt.edu/offices/academic_affairs

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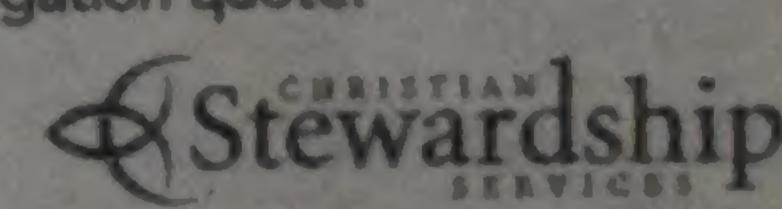


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Princeton - CHOR	8:00 am	1400
Smithers - CFBV	9:15 am	1230
Vernon - CJIB	9:30 pm	94

ALBERTA

Brooks - CIBQ	8:30 am	1340
Edmonton - CJCA	6:00 pm	930

MANITOBA

Winnipeg - CKJS	9:00 am	810
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ONTARIO

Atikokan - CFAK	9:30 am	1240
Chatham - CFCO	6:30 am	630
Hamilton - CHAM	7:30 am	820
London - CKSL	7:00 am	1410
Owen Sound - CFOS	7:00 am	560
Sarnia - CHOK	7:30 am	1070
Stratford - CJCS	8:45 am	1240
Wingham - CKNX	10:30 am	920
Woodstock - CJFH	7:30 am	94.03

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Kentville - CKEN	8:30 am	1490
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 Nordegg CHBW 93.9 FM Sun. 8:30 am
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BRITISH COLUMBIA

Prince Rupert CIAJ 100.7 FM Sat. 10 am

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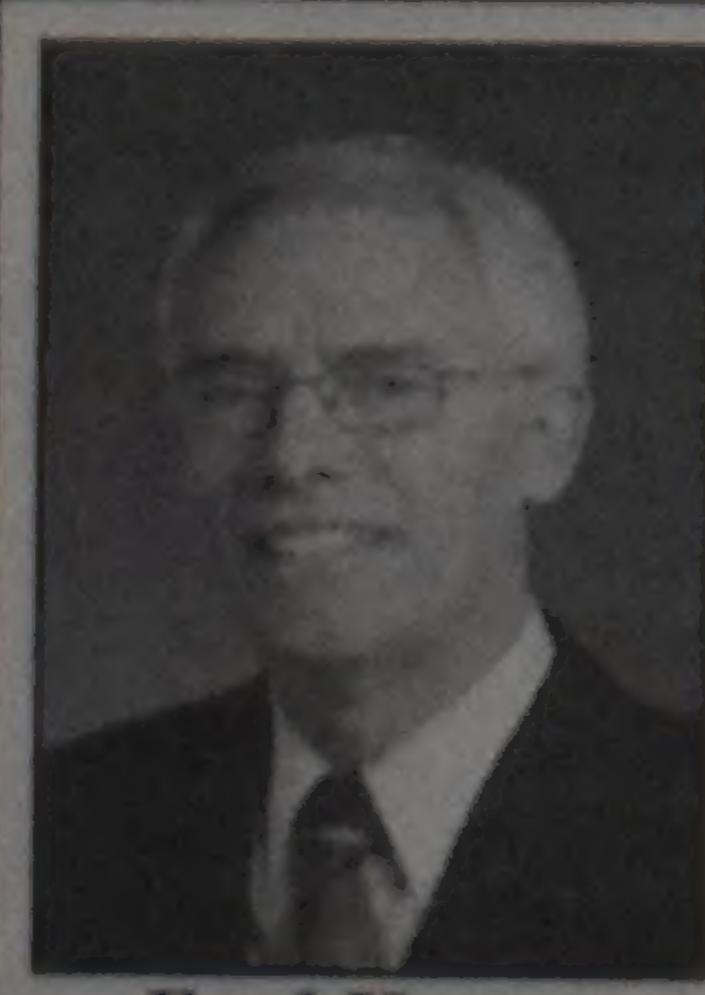
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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Feb 4 Dutch Service will be held in the Ancaster Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Jacob Kuntz will be preaching.

Apr 7 Liberation Choir Easter Concert, 7:30 Great Hall, Hamilton Place. Conductor: Wm. van Suijdam, MC: Michael Coren. Tickets: Hamilton Place box office, ticket master, choir members.

1983 25 Jaar 2007

The Woodstock Dutch Theatre Groep presenteert....
"Ik Voel Nattigheid"

Een klucht in drie bedrijven door Berend Heemskerk
 At The "Market Centre Theatre"
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Friday, March 2 & Saturday, March 3, at 8:00 p.m.
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Admission \$12.00 in advance only
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As wind power grows so do the questions

According to a report in the New York Times, the wind power industry is expected to triple by 2015, but at the same time questions are being raised about the safety of the turbines and the reliability of the power produced in this way.

In Canada wind power capacity more than doubled in 2006 to 1,500 MW and will increase by even more in 2007. Projects capable of generating almost 1,000 MW are supposed to be completed this year. That's enough to power some ten small cities of about 70,000 people.

Critics, however, are complaining about noise, vibrations, bird and bat safety and their looks. Now those complaints are being expanded, as it turns out that few of the wind turbines live up to their initial claims. Wind farms near Lake Huron generated less than one-quarter of the capacity that we had been led to expect. Although this farm may

not be typical, none have lived up to their billing. In other words, they have been over-hyped.

Moreover, wind farms don't always generate power at the right times. Peak usage times don't always coincide with peak wind times. Sudden surges of power may also cause problems on the grid. To be on the safe side, Alberta has put a cap on the amount of wind power it will permit to be put online. Proponents of wind power point out that once wind farms are spread over a large number of locations, such surges will not be a problem since the wind will likely not behave the same way in all parts of the province.

Research is also being done for better ways to store electrical energy to help balance the uneven nature of wind power.

LIBERATION CHOIR

EASTER CONCERT

Guelph Symphony Orchestra
Combined Children's Choir



Saturday, April 7, 2007
at 7:30 pm.



Great Hall, Hamilton Place

Director in charge of the Evening
Willem van Suijdam

Director in charge of
Guelph Symphony Orchestra
Simon Irving

Director in charge of Combined Children's Choir

Elizabeth Webster

Soprano Soloist
Jennifer McMahon



Conductor
Willem van Suijdam



Master of Ceremonies
Michael Coren

Ticket prices: \$40. - \$33. - \$25.

Tickets are available from: Hamilton Place Box Office, Ticket Master, Liberation Choir Members, selected Dutch Stores and at Pianohouse Burlington, 5205 Harvester Road, Burlington.

News briefs

I learned to sing, "You're the cream in my coffee; you're the milk in my tea." But that song may have to be revised. It may be taken as an insult. According to a German study, adding milk to tea ruins the health benefits of the drink. Sigh! All those studies have a tendency to take the romance out of life, don't they?

Tea accomplishes its good works with complex compounds called polyphenols which help the arteries to relax or dilate, allowing your blood to flow more smoothly.

What happens if you have a glass of milk shortly after drinking your half litre of tea? (Yes, this experiment was not carried out with high-class ladies sipping tea out of teenie-weenie china cups; these were tea-guzzling, tea-boozing women who swigged a half-litre at a time.) The study didn't say whether the benefits of tea are wiped out by the benefits (calcium, remember?) of milk. But I have visions of a civil war being waged inside me between the forces of tea and the forces of milk. Who should I cheer for?

Good news – if you're one of those despicable human beings who can't stand either dogs or cats. Otherwise, bad news. Despite all that you've read about the benefits of pets, pet owners seem to be no healthier than anyone else. On the contrary, they seem to be less healthy.

But weren't pets supposed to lower your heart rate, decrease blood pressure, relieve stress and generally restore you to fellowship with the broader communion of creatures? It has even been suggested that pets extend your life. I've always suspected that those extra days are more than offset, however, by the days you spend chasing and cleaning up after your pets.

A Finnish study found that pet owners were more likely to suffer from illnesses such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, ulcers, depression and kidney disease. They also smoked

more and tended to be more overweight. Now, who would have guessed that?

I have visions of Finnish men picking up a leash and saying to their wives, "Honey, I'm going to take the dog out for a run." And then they toddle off out of sight, sit down somewhere and have a leisurely smoke. That involves a lot of deception. Leading such a double life in which one pretends to love puppies and exercise while indulging in socially unacceptable addictive behavior must be the sociological explanation for the ulcers and depression.

Or maybe pets aren't medicine – just beasties – and you'd be silly to take them like pills.

Here's a study that I personally found heartening. An economist who studies what contributes to long life says that one thing linked to a longer life span no matter what race you are or in what country you live is education. Education is even more important than wealth or health insurance in adding years to your life.

"If you were to ask me what affects health and longevity," says Michael Grossman, a health economist at the City University of New York, "I would put education at the top of my list."

And he isn't on the payroll of the National Education Association either.

Now, isn't that heartening? All those years spent sitting in a stuffy classroom listening to a boring teacher will be paid back in the end. Every year in school, the study, suggests, adds a year and a half to your lifespan. The longer you spend in school, the greater the benefit. Within limits, of course. You cannot expect to gain eternal life by becoming an eternal student.

Maybe educated people pay more attention to important studies that tell them not to put milk in their tea and to stop chasing dogs and cats.

The increasing use of biofuels raises ethical questions

As governments and industry in both the U.S. and Canada turn to biofuels, especially ethanol, to supplement the dwindling supply of oil, warnings are being raised. A study released by the Earth Policy Institute (EPI) expresses worries about the impact that the dozens of biofuel plants being built in North America will have on the world's food supply.

"We're worried there will be less to feed the world if we're using too much corn to make fuel," says Lester Brown, EPI's president. "The US ... supplies 70 percent of the world's corn exports. These previously unidentified distilleries could have a big negative impact."

According to U.S. government estimates, the U.S. alone will need about 60 million tons of corn from the 2008 harvest to supply all the ethanol plants. But critics say that's a very low estimate. Because the count of plants

being built is low, the capacity may be double this estimate.

Moreover, with a high demand for corn to be processed into ethanol, corn prices may rise steeply and undermine the financial viability of the plants by eating away the profit margin. Oil prices also affect the profit margin, as the price of ethanol rises and falls with the price of oil. If it were to drop below \$60 a barrel, the profit margins for ethanol manufacturers would be slashed even further.

But at the same time, the cost of the corn to the world's poor countries will go up. And as more acreage is devoted to biofuel crops, less will be devoted to growing food crops. While ethanol is a cleaner fuel than oil, there are clearly ethical questions attached to its production.